SHOUT
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CASTE, RELIGION AND POWER

AN INDIAN CASE STUDY

PARTAP C. AGGARWAL

SRC

SHRI RAM CENTRE FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
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FOREWORD

NO country can match India's cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity. To make the picture even more complex, a peasantry exists here along with a modern industrial sector. In addition to all this, the Indian society is divided into a number of caste groups which interact with each other according to ancient rules.

During the colonial period local and regional cultural patterns were preserved by a policy of non-interference in the "native" customs. An overall administrative structure was created with a small service cadre just enough to maintain peace and order. But with the attainment of Independence a number of forces have been unleashed which are pulverizing the diversities and are leading towards homogeneity. Some of the more notable of these forces are: a government based on universal adult franchise, democratic decentralization, and a national commitment for economic development, social equality, and secularism.

The present study examines the changing Indian society by focussing on one small community. But what this intimate ethnographic study highlights should be of interest to behavioural scientists of all major disciplines. Particularly, the detailed account of the breakdown of the *jajmani* system in Mewat and its effect on agricultural labour will be of interest to the manpower specialists. Likewise, tensions generated by changing inter-caste relationships, new religious affiliations, vacillating political alignments, and increased tempo of economic activity are discussed in this study from the perspective of a village community. An understanding of the tensions at such basic level should, it is hoped, enhance our knowledge of conflict at all other levels in our rapidly changing country.

At the Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations, the publication of Dr. Aggarwal's book represents a significant broadening of research interest. After all, human relations in industry, our major concern till now, cannot remain

unaffected by events in India's villages. Recognizing this, we plan to encourage more studies on the changing rural scene and on social tensions.

ARUN JOSHI

Director
Shri Ram Centre for
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2 October 1971

INTRODUCTION

IT is cause for satisfaction that Dr. Partap C. Aggarwal's useful and insightful study of the Meos of north India and of the area (Mewat) in which they are concentrated is now available as a book. In re-reading the manuscript in preparation for writing this introduction, I was again impressed by the evidences of Dr. Aggarwal's industry, sensitivity, and temperamental suitability as a researcher. His affection for the people he approached, his understanding of their misgivings concerning his role, his willingness to learn the local dialect and to share the mode of life of his new friends and helpers mark him as a participant observer of the first order. He is well versed in economics and aware of the problems and pressures from this source to which the Mewatis respond. Yet he is not unmindful of the strong eddies caused by the currents of politics and religion. His is a balanced account, written with humour and grace, motivated by a desire to know and understand.

The book has many facets and merits which the reader will discover for himself. Here I shall mention only a few which seem to me to be particularly important.

To begin with, Mewat is a little-known, though culturally complex, area, and any solid information about it is welcome. For another thing, Mewat is not a political or administrative unit. In fact, it straddles more than one Indian State. It is, rather, an extent of territory within which persons of similar affiliation and background live in sufficient numbers to constitute a force. Dr. Aggarwal's task in demarcating the boundaries of his study, geographically and ideologically, suggests the degree to which informal, traditional ties, as well as official labels, must be taken into account in realistic social science endeavours.

Another most interesting aspect of the inquiry is the manner in which it calls attention to the hazards of over-facile prediction in human affairs. The Meos whom Dr. Aggarwal studied are people who, though their ancestors

became nominal converts to Islam centuries ago, mainly followed Hindu practices and chose to remain in India at partition. The expectation was that in a Hindu-majority country, where feeling ran high among some sections of the population against Mohammedans after partition and the related disorders, they would retreat still further from Islam and seek greater safety and social recognition in the Hindu fold. Yet, instead, they became more greatly Mohammedanized and, indeed, have become involved in an Islamic revival movement. Dr. Aggarwal's description of the circumstances and forces that account for this unexpected development is illuminating and convincing.

To some degree this book is a community study, for it includes an investigation in depth of a representative Meo village. But it is a community study with a difference. The ties of the village with others and with other parts of Mewat are fully explored. The impact of national movements, political struggles, Independence, partition, and world events on the village and area are made explicit. The study is noteworthy for the levels of interaction it takes into account. If more research which offers this breadth of interest, as well as intensity, could be undertaken, we should hear far less about the atomism and parochialism of community studies.

Of special interest is Dr. Aggarwal's portrayal of the many changes that can be traced to the shifts in distribution of power that have recently taken place in the section in which he worked. It was the intent of much legislation at the national and State level to accomplish just this: the land distribution programmes, the broadening of the franchise, the penalization of discrimination based on caste, the special provisions in education and politics for the "scheduled castes", etc., were intended to channel more influence and a greater share of the wealth to the poor and repressed. In Mewat this had to be accomplished at the expense of the dominant Meos. Yet it cannot be assumed that redistribution of power has occurred or can occur so readily everywhere in India. The Meos were particularly vulnerable to the forces of change that were set in motion in India in 1947 and the years immediately fol-

lowing. At least one-fourth of them left for Pakistan, and so their numerical strength was reduced. Some young hotheads among them joined a pro-Pakistan movement and brought the wrath of the Alwar and Bharatpur State governments and their military arm down upon the group. As a result, many of them had to flee their lands, and a portion of these never recovered them. Thus a significant source of wealth and associated prestige was lost. Punjabi refugees took the places and lands of those who fled and constituted a counterweight to their influence. Since they lived all too near centres of communal strife and feelings rose against them because of their Muslim ties, the Meos were more easily dispossessed and shorn of leadership than would otherwise have been the case. Perhaps for the Indian reformer the question is: How can the redistribution and wider dissemination of power, wealth, dignity, and office—aided in Mewat by special circumstances—be stimulated in other areas to the same degree by the well-considered efforts of planners and administrators? If any appreciable progress is to be made along these lines, studies such as this one I commend to the reader will have to be thoughtfully appraised.

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The author accepts full responsibility for the views expressed in this book and also for the omissions and commissions.

A NOTE ON NON-ENGLISH WORDS USED IN THE STUDY

ALL non-English words used in this study which are not proper nouns are italicized. Proper nouns, such as names of castes, places, religious festivals, etc., are not italicized but are begun with a capital letter. The convention of adding "s" to form the plural, as in English, has been adopted for the non-English words.

Each word, when used first, is explained either in parentheses following the word or in a footnote. Non-English words which are frequently used in the text are listed in the Glossary given at the end of the study, together with a brief explanation and the proper diacritical marks for phonetic rendition. Diacritical marks have been used in Tables 9 and 10 and in Appendices B and C, since the terms listed in these are not included in the Glossary. Local dialect, rather than standard Hindi, has been used throughout.

Pseudonyms have been employed for persons referred to in the study except for a few public figures.

TO
THE MEWATIS

Chapter 1

RESEARCH, FIELD SITUATION, AND METHODS

THE RESEARCH

THIS study relates to a community of people, known as Meos, who number approximately 400,000 and occupy the area popularly called Mewat, straddling the Rajasthan-Haryana border in northern India. Although the Meos were converted from Hinduism to Islam about four centuries back, their adoption of Islamic cultural practices—even the religious injunctions prescribed in the *Koran*—remained until 1947 at best nominal and did not advance beyond male circumcision and burial of the dead. Their amalgam of the customs of the two religions was considered bizarre by both Hindus and Muslims outside of Mewat. The Meos' response to this view of their culture was to avoid outsiders. But they felt no pressing need to bend in either direction, for their position in Mewat was secure. None of the other caste groups in Mewat questioned the Meo dominance. In their dealings with the Meos, the Hindus virtually ignored the fact that the former had embraced Islam.

At the time of the partition of India in 1947, nearly 25 per cent of the Meos migrated to Pakistan. Anyone who is familiar with Hindu-Muslim relations in the subcontinent during the past 30 years knows that the Meos in India may have benefited by emphasizing their Hindu heritage. But the Meos began abandoning Hindu customs with a vengeance and, by 1964, when I worked among them, they had adopted a good many of the Muslim practices. Why was it so?

This question was the first major stimulus for the present research. The second question that aroused my curiosity concerned the Meos' place in Mewati society. How did the Muslim Meos fit into the caste structure of Mewati villages in which both Hindus and Muslims (and more recently

also Sikhs) were residing? A large percentage of Muslims in pre-partition India (except in East Bengal and West Punjab, now in Pakistan) lived in urban areas. Others generally constituted service castes such as Nai, Dhobi, Julaha, Sakka, Kasai, Mirasi, etc., and lived in Hindu majority villages. Muslim landlords, by and large, avoided contact with the villagers and preferred to interact with the aristocratic urban Muslim families. In a few villages (e.g., of Meerut and Saharanpur districts of U.P.) where Muslims of Rajput extraction were a dominant land-owning caste, there was a tendency on the part of many of the service castes to adopt the religion of their patrons; those who were unwilling to do this tried to seek a Hindu village for adequate clientele.

In Mewat, the situation was different. Here, the Muslim Meos were the dominant caste, and a large number of the Hindu castes, from the "untouchable" Bhangi to the orthodox Brahman, were represented in fair numbers together with a sprinkling of Muslim castes such as the Sakkas, the Faqirs, and the Mirasis. The caste system together with the traditional *jajmani*[1] (barter) arrangement was operative. The Meos, like their Hindu counterparts throughout northern India, played the role of the *jajman* (patron) and utilized the economic and ritual services of the other castes. My objective was to find out: How the system worked? How was the status of the Meos, and other castes, determined? How were the rules of commensality, purity-pollution, social and personal conduct, etc., carried out within and between the Hindu and Muslim castes? How did the Muslim Meos fit into this web of relationships between the various castes governed by complex rules?

As it frequently happens in ethnographic research, while in the field I found new areas of absorbing interest and, consequently, I had to enlarge the scope of my inquiries.

1. The *jajmani* system is an arrangement between the various castes whereby the service castes provide economic and ritual services to the land-owning castes in the village in exchange for fixed yearly payments in kind.

I was struck by the great speed and the revolutionary nature of social and cultural change that dominated the village scene. I noticed that the democratic institutions based on universal adult franchise, introduced in India at various levels from Parliament down to the village panchayat, were profoundly affecting the traditional birth-ascribed leadership structure of the village. I was astonished to see the extent to which the Constitutional provisions helped the under-privileged castes in their endeavours to raise their social status. I further noted how the villager, who had for centuries viewed the government as an exploitative and coercive agency, was adapting to the democratic concept. All this led to the third important question: What had stimulated the villagers towards greater activity and the desire for participation in a wider society?

Chavandi Kalan, the Mewati village I studied, is by no means a typical Indian village. Hence, generalizations derived from this study may not be applicable to the whole of India; but, as shall become clear later, the unusual developments that have occurred in Chavandi Kalan afford us an insight into the processes of Indian society and, particularly, the developmental change since Independence.

For instance, some Meos, while migrating to Pakistan in 1947, abandoned their land and houses. The evacuated property was distributed among the Punjabi refugees from Pakistan and the scheduled castes. Some of the land was acquired by the Brahmans with the connivance of the government officials during the period of unrest following partition. As a result, the Meos not only suffered a reduction in their number but also lost their monopoly of ownership of land. These developments seriously affected their political dominance and social prestige, and a fundamental change in the power structure of the village community ensued. The final blow came in the shape of village panchayat based on adult franchise. This had not only further weakened the already curtailed power of the Meos, but, with guaranteed representation to the schedul-

ed castes, strengthened the power base of the underprivileged castes, especially the numerically strong Chamars. Consequently, the traditional caste hierarchy was broken, and there was a scramble for political power among the various castes. Lower castes were actively seizing this opportunity for their upward mobility and, to consolidate the gain, started emulating the behaviour patterns of the higher castes. Interestingly, the Brahmans were willingly making real concessions in their religious position in exchange for political power. This was indicated by the *purohit* serving the Chamars, and a Brahman living with a Chamar woman and championing her people's cause in the political arena. The Meos, on the other hand, were trying to salvage whatever they could of their lost power by closing their ranks.

In my opinion, what we observe in Chavandi Kalan provides an insight into the working of the caste system and supports the view that the crucial basis of caste hierarchy in the Indian village was the unequal distribution of economic and political power. It cannot be denied that the *karma* theory of Hinduism lent support to caste, and that the purity-pollution syndrome provided a measure for ranking the castes. But the case described in this study unmistakably suggests that power is a key variable in Indian caste, for we note that as soon as the power centre shifts the hierarchy of caste crumbles like a castle of cards. It is amazing that after so many centuries of dominance by higher castes, the Chamars of Chavandi Kalan suddenly responded to an opportunity for upward social and political mobility without pausing to wonder whether or not they were violating any religious prescription. They seem never to have really believed in the *karma* theory, or, at least, they were able to account for their present good fortune in terms of their *karma*.

This, then, is what the present study is about. I start with the field situation and the research methodology in order to give the reader some basis for evaluating my data. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 briefly discuss Mewat, the his-

tory of the Meos, and the events of 1947, thereby illuminating the background and the wider setting of the Meos. The ethnographic account in Chapters 5 to 11 focuses on the Meos of Chavandi Kalan and describes in detail the economic, political, and religious aspects of their culture; in this I have not tried to separate the traditional from the new. Change dominates the village scene, and the old and the new are intertwined; drawing an arbitrary line between the two would distort the picture. In the concluding chapter, I have attempted to answer the questions raised above.

THE FIELD SITUATION

The bulk of the data for the present study was collected during my stay from 7 January 1964 to 15 January 1965 in a Mewati village called Chavandi Kalan. During this period, my wife, daughter, and I lived as members of the village community in a mud-hut situated in the main settlement. The hut was recently built by a Bania family for its buffaloes. To make it habitable for human beings, we made a few minor alterations in it besides getting the floor plastered with a thick layer of mud mixed with cow-dung.

Chavandi Kalan proved very suitable for the research, for it is a typical Mewati village with regard to size, location, caste composition, as well as economic and social organization. That part of Mewat in which Chavandi Kalan is situated is considered economically poor, politically backward, and less responsive to the Muslim religious revival movement which is currently very popular in many parts of Mewat. But, however slowly, this area has definitely begun to change along with the region as a whole.

It took me nearly two months of extensive travelling in Mewat before I had decided to work in Chavandi Kalan. My first contacts in Mewat were with some educated Meos who lived in larger villages. These men were extremely courteous and hospitable to me, but I felt that they did not understand what I was planning to do. They

tended to be overprotective and suggested villages which they thought would be convenient from the point of view of physical comforts. Some of them offered to put me up in their villages. But I decided that the best way for me to find a suitable village was to settle down temporarily in a central location in Mewat, to visit the surrounding area, and to make a decision for myself. One consideration that led me to this decision was the fact that one of my best contact men had, in the recent past, managed to control the work of at least two field researchers that preceded me in the area. He not only had misconceptions about social science research but also felt that it was his duty to see that the researchers did not notice those aspects of Meo culture which he thought were unpleasant.

My family and I lived in a large village, Tijara, in Alwar district, for about twenty days. Tijara is centrally located and is connected with most of the important Mewati towns by fairly good roads. With temporary headquarters at Tijara, I visited a number of villages. The Community Development Department personnel were very cooperative in supplying me information about the area, and on many occasions some of their younger members accompanied me to the villages.

In most cases the people were very hospitable. To my suggestion that I might come back and stay in their village for a year, the response was always one of welcome. But it was obvious that I was never taken seriously. It seemed that I was taken for a government official and it was believed that I would be visiting the villages occasionally only for a few hours. The Meos were very shrewd in this regard. Together with their approval of my settling down in their village, they would express skepticism by saying: "Oh, *babuji*,[2] you would not like to live in our village. Here, there are no comforts and conveniences of the city. Why should you suffer the kind of life we live!"

2. *Babuji* is a generic term used by the villagers to address all educated city men.

On my first visit to Chavandi Kalan, the Gram Sevak—the Village Level Worker of the Community Development Department—took me round to see the village and to meet the men that count. Everyone I met greeted me warmly and said that my family and I would be welcome to stay in the village. One farmer remarked: "I am sure you will learn about village life in a year. Do you see that mare? Well, when I bought her a year ago, she was not so docile as she looks now. She was so shy that even if you touched her lightly she jumped over the wall. If a mare could learn in a year, you too can!"

When I visited Chavandi Kalan the second time, the welcome smiles were not there. This time the school teacher helped me rent a house. At first I was told by some Meos that there was no house in the village for renting, which I knew was not true for I had noticed several vacant houses that could easily be made habitable. I thought my best bet would perhaps be to approach some Bania[3] family since most of the vacant houses in the village were owned by the Banias. Luckily, a Bania family did have a house available. A rent that was high for the village was quoted, which I agreed to pay after showing some mock concern. I gave an advance of ten rupees to the owner and it was agreed that he would get it cleaned and plastered in two days.

On the third day I was going to the village to see if the house was ready for occupation. On the way near the village I overheard a man saying to another, "Say, what is this incestuous *tamasha* [joke]?" The other replied, "Whoever he is, he'd better stay away or he might get beaten up." On reaching the village I found that the house had not been repaired. The Bania had had second thoughts and wanted to go back on some of the promises he had made. I noticed the ten-rupee note in his pocket which he would have returned to me had I insisted on his carrying out the agreement. Therefore, I did not give

3. Banias are the traders and moneylenders.

the Bania any opportunity for refunding the money on some excuse. Later I learned from the school teacher that the villagers were very apprehensive of my coming to the village and that, therefore, they brought pressure to bear on the Bania not to rent me the house. On my return to Tijara, my wife and I decided to go to Chavandi Kalan without any delay. The next day—7 January 1964—we arrived in Chavandi Kalan with our baggage. Men, women, and children gathered around the house peeping with great curiosity at our belongings and commenting on who we might be and how long we might stay in that village.

My family and I tried to live as much like the village people as possible. For our food we depended almost entirely on the local supply. Our house looked very much like a typical village house, the only difference being that we built an enclosed bathroom and a latrine inside of the house. Most village houses did not have such facilities, for the villagers prefer to go to the adjoining fields to answer the calls of nature. My wife and daughter wore local dress, though I continued to wear my usual Western-style dress. However, I took care to use inexpensive material for my clothes and did not wash them too often, so as to minimize the difference in dress. On the whole, we tried to avoid using things from the city. In spite of our best efforts to live simply, our average monthly expenditure was much higher than that of even the relatively wealthy villagers. People tended to exaggerate our expenditures and were always eager to know how much I earned. They thought my income amounted to a fantastic sum. Whenever asked about my salary, I gave a vague explanation, saying that my university took care of my *dal-roti* (subsistence).

But this did not convince the villagers. They only accepted the fact that now that we had come we were to be put up with. They were afraid of us, and word went round that the villagers should be careful about what they divulged to me. The village people were trying hard to find out who I was and why I had come to Chavandi

Kalan. I described myself as a university student interested in learning about village life, but no villager believed this story. They had a suspicion that for some secret reason I was not revealing my real identity. This suspicion persisted even after many of them took me as a friend and trusted me. This was evident by an incident that occurred several months after my arrival in Chavandi Kalan. Some guests were visiting a family in the village known to me well. One of the guests asked about me. A Meo friend of mine tried to repeat what I had told him many times, but obviously without conviction. He stopped rather suddenly and suggested that I should speak for myself. I gave as convincing an explanation as I could manage. The guests were still unconvinced, and one of them said, "This man is dangerous. He may cause us all to be driven out of our homes." One of my friends replied, "Well, if this *babuji* is going to evacuate us, we don't mind. We know he is a good man, and he will certainly take us to a good place."

The villagers tried to explain me and my motives in various ways. At first most of them were convinced that I was eloping with a woman. They thought we were trying to hide in a village until the anger of our relatives had cooled down. This suspicion, of course, did not last very long. Another theory was that I was a government spy sent to report on the activities of the Meos. This fear lasted almost until I left the village. It became more and more confirmed when they saw my camera, tape-recorder, and typewriter.

As soon as the villagers discovered that I had some relationship with the United States, they took me for an American spy. In a short time a legend was afloat explaining my relationship with America. According to this legend, the British, being clever, sold India to the Americans before leaving the country. Now that the full payment had been made, the Americans were preparing to take control of India. They sent 500 agents to different parts of the country to collect information, I being one of them. As soon as the information was gathered, Ameri-

can rule would follow. Yet others thought that I was a Russian agent. Their line of reasoning was: "In Russia everyone is equal. This man seems to treat all the *jats* [castes] equal. So he must be a Russian agent." One villager further added: "If Russian rule comes, all the land will be taken over by the state. Men and women will have to work for daily wages. Children will be raised by state *dai* [midwives]. Parents will not be allowed to visit their children."

While these suspicions were being entertained, my family and I were making more and more friends in the village. From the very beginning of my settling down in the village I realized that for a more meaningful relationship with the villagers we would have to belong to a caste in the village and observe its rules. I decided to affiliate myself with the Meos. I started smoking with the Meos' water pipe; my wife, daughter, and I ate and drank with the Meos, and we accepted buffalo meat at Meo houses. This helped the villagers in admitting us to their society. The Meos warned me that I should not eat or smoke with the Chamars and other "untouchable" castes and, if I did, they would be embarrassed and would have to replace their polluted water pipes. The Hindus, on the other hand, treated us as Meos and refused to eat or drink with us. Even the Banias, who were aware of the fact that we belonged to their caste, would not accept food or water from us.

Whenever people of my village travelled with me in Mewat they were asked questions about me. Often my friends would say that I was a Meo and a Muslim. Very often people told us that they had heard about me: a strange man from America who had machines that could pick up whatever was being said anywhere in the village. This had spread as far away as the Meo villages in Pakistan. People of my village were very much impressed with me and thought that I was of a higher rank than any of the government officials in the area. I was believed to have unusual faculties of various sorts. Once I returned to Chavandi Kalan after fifteen days' absence. In the

meanwhile a legend had spread that at a nearby possible dam-site I had demonstrated to the baffled engineers how to use their surveying machine. The story went that after looking through the surveying machine I quickly told them where the dam should be raised and that the government had given me a reward of Rs. 1,100. The villagers thought I was being modest when I told them that I did not know anything about the dam.

Relations with Government Officials

Some of my friends in Delhi, more familiar with the ways of government officials than I was, advised me to get in touch with the local officials as soon as I settled down at a place. I was told that my failure to contact them would offend them, and if they so desired they could create all sorts of difficulties for me. I found that it was sufficient to contact a few of the high officials, who were very cordial and cooperative. Many of them had come from the city and welcomed an opportunity to meet and talk with a person of their own "class".

I used a carefully-designed visiting card to introduce myself. Also I carried with me several letters of introduction. I had to use the letters only when I was challenged—which happened twice when men from the police department came and asked me who I was and what I was doing. The letters of introduction proved satisfactory to them. But for those letters I would have been in a difficult position, for verbal explanations did not seem to satisfy them. The reason for this was that they had to take back something in writing to show to their superiors. Therefore, on both the occasions they copied down my letters of introduction. I carried one letter from Cornell, one from the East-West Centre, and a note from the Director of the Indian Institute of Public Administration in New Delhi. The last letter was the most effective one, for it was from an official of the Government of India.

The Clinic

A few days after settling down in Chavandi Kalan I

set up a first-aid clinic in my house. I had not planned it, but I did bring a supply of patent medicines for common ailments such as stomach ache, sore eye, diarrhoea, etc. I also had a supply of bandage cloth and instruments for treating wounds and cuts. Soon, I began receiving streams of patients every day and at all hours. It took so much of my time to treat the patients that I had to fix certain hours for the clinic.

There were many advantages and disadvantages in running the clinic. Coming to advantages, first of all, it gave me a useful and understandable role in the village. From the very beginning of my arrival in the village, people wanted to know what use I could be for the village. I tried to explain that my study would probably lead to a better understanding of the problems of the rural people and that perhaps as a result the government's development plans would improve. However, this explanation did not seem to make any impression upon them; but the clinic was a concrete example of my usefulness. Second, I got to know intimately a number of men, women, and children. I used to take down the name, father's/husband's name, caste, ailment, and treatment of every patient. This practice provided me with some useful data and helped in other ways. For example, when I was taking a census of the village, no objection was raised to my recording the names and other information because the villagers knew that I had already their names written down anyway. In the third place, as the doctor, I gained access to the villagers' homes. Nobody objected to my talking to women, many of whom I came to know by name. Often my patients invited me for a meal, apparently in gratitude for what I had done for them.

As to the disadvantages, whenever I told patients that their ailments were beyond my knowledge, I was misunderstood. People would not believe me when I told them that I was not a doctor and advised them to take the patients to a hospital. They thought I was trying to put them off for some reason. Second, I often felt that the clinic took too much of my time which could be put

to better use in collecting data.

RESEARCH METHODS

A good deal of the field data was recorded on the basis of participant observation. In this type of research the size of the village is of crucial importance. Chavandi Kalan, with a population of 640, was neither too big nor too small. Nearly 120 village households were grouped into 16 castes, some of which lived in hamlets but a majority inhabited the main settlement.

There were a few gossip centres in the village where everything of importance was discussed. In order to keep abreast of village life, I tried to visit all of these centres every day or every other day in a systematic way. These meetings were quite informal, and I could know what was going on in the village and ask questions when something was not clear to me. However, I could not take down notes because people stopped talking as soon as I took out my notebook. I used to go home after participation in those sessions and write down all that I could recall. In individual interviews people did not seem to mind if I took down notes there and then. So that people would think of it as part of my dress, I began carrying a cloth shoulder-bag wherever I went, with the result that I could take the notebook, camera, and other equipment unnoticed.

My family and I established such close relationships with some of the village families that we referred to each other by kinship terms. On occasions we exchanged gifts according to the local custom. This practice not only made our relationships intimate but also insured that we would be notified and invited to all functions and important occasions. People began to trust me, and my presence at functions was taken for granted. But whenever I participated in events in other villages together with people of Chavandi Kalan, I was suspected and my presence was very much noticed. At a Fatiha (funeral feast) in another village, my presence was vehemently protested by some younger men who thought that I should not

be allowed to observe the activities in which women participated. My companions from Chavandi Kalan defended me as much as they could, but after a while I was politely escorted away.

The presence with me of my wife and daughter was very helpful in establishing rapport with the villagers. My wife could approach the women with much more ease, and she collected for me some useful data relating to women and children. Our little daughter made many friends in the village and played with them all the day. Through her we obtained a valuable insight into the socialization process in the village. For example, like the village children, she learned to enjoy bland local *roti* (unleavened bread) and rejected fruits and vegetables which we, her parents, relished whenever we could obtain them. Also, from the point of view of the villager, a stranger with a family is less dangerous than a stranger who is living alone. When I was finally leaving the village I asked a friend if there was any gossip concerning me of the kind that circulated about most village men. His reply was, "Thanks to your wife, no." Apparently my wife's presence and her care to observe local conventions had been a great help in the field work.

For the collection of statistical data, I used a questionnaire that was coded for computer processing. Most of the responses were recorded in code numbers with ease and speed unattainable by any other known method. I asked questions relating to caste, family, land and other property, agriculture, marriage, voting records, extra-village contacts, etc. The questionnaire and the recording sheet are given in Appendix I. I administered the questionnaire after living in the village for about six months. In spite of the fact that I was well acquainted with quite a good number of people, and most of them by name, I was doubtful of my success with the questionnaire. I was afraid that even if one person refused to respond, others would do the same. In arranging the interviews, I put the easier cases first and the doubtful ones last. After I had successfully interviewed about half of the families

in the village, the rest did not object. They took the attitude that those who had responded to the questionnaire must have been convinced of its harmlessness.

While taking the census of the village I discovered it essential that I interview the villagers directly and not accept secondhand information from the apparently knowledgeable local people. An illustration will help to clarify this point. The village Patvari, who had known Chavandi Kalan for over ten years, offered to provide some of the information I was collecting. I took down what he had to say, but later when I verified the information, it turned out to be inaccurate. The Patvari felt a bit insulted, but the cost of saving his honour was too high for me.

For obtaining detailed information on various matters and for verifying some of it, I used four persons as key informants. They were selected for their knowledge, experience, and involvement in local social activities. Also, these persons were affable and had time to spare. Some of them often accompanied me on my visits to other villages.

I employed Goodenough's technique of scale analysis for the study of rights and obligations of sets of relatives with regard to each other.[4] Although the scale did not come out perfectly, much of the information gathered proved to be very valuable. For interviewing the people of other villages, I used a questionnaire I prepared in the field. It was very helpful in interviewing those who could not give much time but from whom I had to get the maximum of information in a brief interview. My experience has been that the quality of the responses directly corresponded to the degree of rapport between me and my respondents. In some cases the interviewees refused to answer some of my questions.

I took more than five hundred photographs using both colour and black-and-white film. Most men did not ob-

4. Ward H. Goodenough, "Formal Properties of Status Relationships", unpublished manuscript, 1962, 18p.

ject to being photographed, but women frequently did. However, the camera was often a barrier to rapport. Sometimes I noticed that it suddenly appeared to remind my friends that I was a stranger whose behaviour they did not quite understand. Whenever I took pictures of events, which to my village friends looked trivial, it seemed to create a distance between us.

My tape-recorder worked very well mechanically, but the only thing for which I was able to use it was to record some songs and ceremonies. Most people objected to my recording interviews with them. They felt uneasy when the tape-recorder was turned on. The machine itself was quite a novelty for the villagers, and they were mystified and intrigued with the idea. But they considered it dangerous and fabricated legends about its uses. They thought that, by means of this equipment, I could listen in conversations in houses at the other end of the village. It would have been possible to hide the tape-recorder in my bag and turn it on unnoticed for recording interviews, but I thought it unwise to do. I realized that if I was ever discovered recording secretly, people would never trust me.

Although my Indian nationality and knowledge of Hindi were of much help in establishing rapport in the village, I faced considerable difficulties similar to those experienced by other researchers. The villagers knew perfectly well that, like themselves, I was an Indian. I told them my caste and explained my purpose in visiting the village, but my behaviour was so unusual for them that they did not believe me. Evidently, there was no category in their repertoire of social roles into which they could fit me. As a result, they were afraid of me. Even after my family and I had formed some fairly good friendships in the village, the suspicion persisted. My ability to communicate fairly well in the local dialect was of little avail in allaying the villagers' fears, for it was my actions that puzzled them.

Many American field researchers in India have experienced problems in establishing rapport in the Indian

on the way to the village

Anthropologist's abode

village. They were suspected of being missionaries, government officials, spies, or tax investigators. The villagers' suspicion was natural because these were the kind of roles Europeans tended to play in the colonies in the recent past. Furthermore, in the experience of the Indian villager, the European had a great deal of power and money and he looked down upon the Indian. A sympathetic and egalitarian field researcher, without a position in the government, was not frequently encountered by the Indian villager. Naturally, today's field researcher has to pay for the omissions and commissions of his forebears. Unfortunately, an Indian researcher like me has also to experience similar problems because of two main reasons: foreign financial support, and monopoly of the European on scientific research in the colonies for a long time.

Chapter 2

MEWAT

LOCATION AND PHYSICAL FEATURES

MEWAT is not an administrative division and is, therefore, not indicated on any maps or government records. It is the popular name for the area inhabited by the Meos. The Meos claim that the name of the area—Mewat—has been derived from the name of their community, and this is generally accepted by the non-Meos. There seems to be no reason to doubt this claim. In fact, in the present-day usage "Mewat" has come to mean "where the Meos live". Because the extent of the area is conterminous with the settlement of the Meos, there is no fixed boundary of Mewat. As some Meos living on the outskirts of Mewat migrated to Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947, its area has been reduced.

Some people refer to "Mewat" being in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, or in Rajasthan, which really means that there are some Meos outside of Mewat—in U.P. or in other parts of India. The most common reason for the migration of Meos from Mewat appears to have been famine. In a few cases, however, political unrest has been reported to be the cause. A Meo from Tijara, a revenue official, recently spent some time in Tonk (Rajasthan) for training. He told me that there was a "Mewat" in Rajasthan, too, as there were several Meo families living in and around Tonk. Some of them migrated as recently as 1947. Although their number was small, they married among themselves. They would like to marry in Mewat, but the long distance came in their way.

The Meos are sedentary people, and very few of them have any idea of the extent of Mewat. Most of them are familiar only with the area within fifteen or twenty kilometres of their village. Most people are, however, familiar with the names of the relatively large villages and towns

in Mewat, such as Tijara, Ferozepur Jhirka, Nuh, Nagina, Alwar, and Lachhmangarh. The location of Mewat and its accepted boundary with its Pals are shown in Map I.

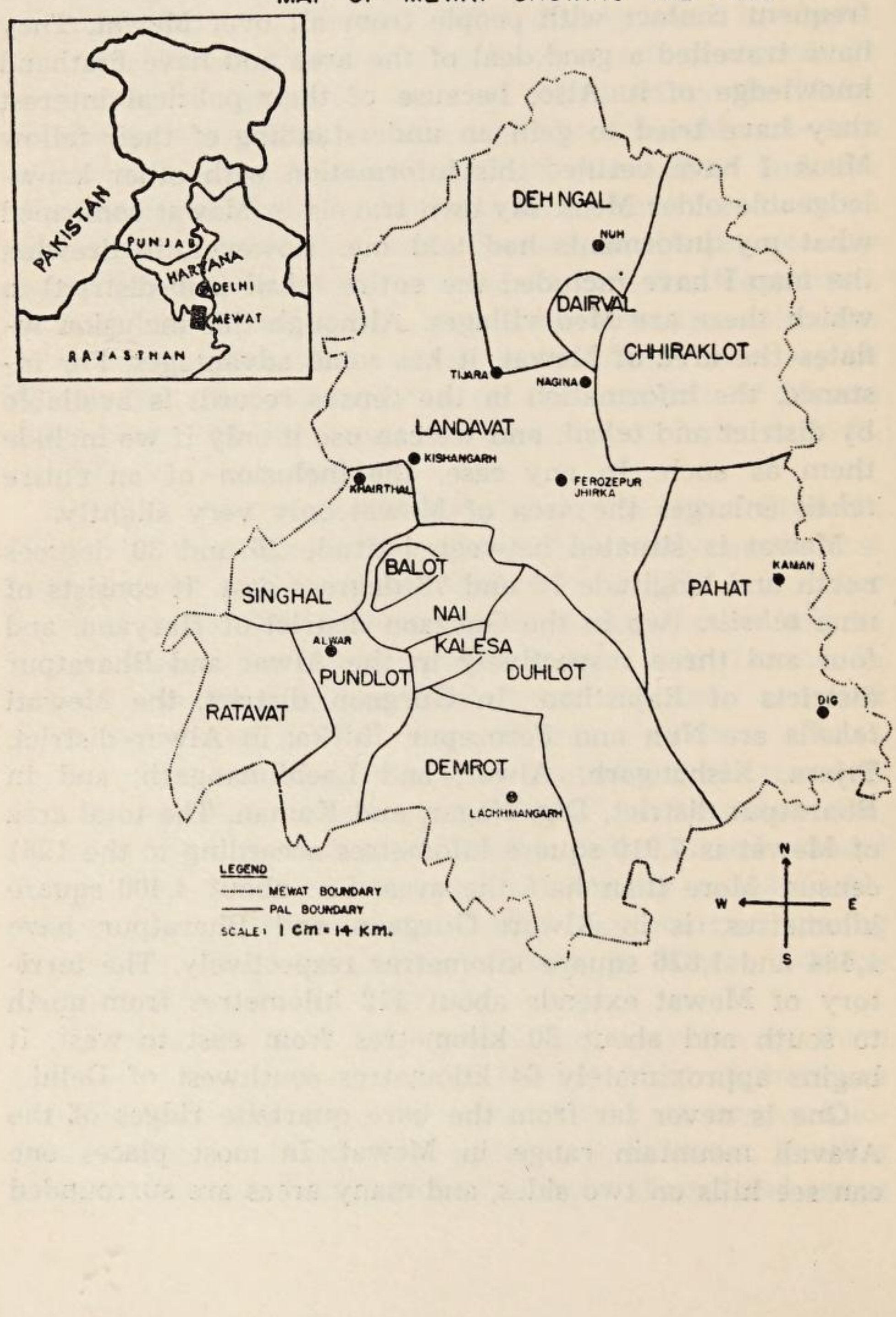
My main sources of information regarding boundaries are two highly educated Meo young men in their early thirties. Both of them live in Mewat and are actively involved in politics. Their political interest brings them in frequent contact with people from all over Mewat. They have travelled a good deal of the area and have firsthand knowledge of it. Also, because of their political interest they have tried to gain an understanding of their fellow Meos. I have verified this information with other knowledgeable older Meos. My own travels in Mewat confirmed what my informants had told me. However, in drawing the map I have included the entire *tehsil* (sub-district) in which there are Meo villages. Although this inclusion inflates the area of Mewat, it has some advantages. For instance, the information in the census records is available by district and *tehsil*, and we can use it only if we include them as such. In any case, the inclusion of an entire *tehsil* enlarges the area of Mewat only very slightly.

Mewat is situated between latitude 26 and 30 degrees north and longitude 76 and 78 degrees east. It consists of nine *tehsils*, two in the Gurgaon district of Haryana, and four and three respectively in the Alwar and Bharatpur districts of Rajasthan. In Gurgaon district, the Mewati *tehsils* are Nuh and Ferozepur Jhirka; in Alwar district, Tijara, Kishangarh, Alwar, and Lachhmangarh; and in Bharatpur district, Dig, Nagar, and Kaman. The total area of Mewat is 7,910 square kilometres according to the 1961 census. More than half the area, i.e., about 4,400 square kilometres, is in Alwar; Gurgaon and Bharatpur have 1,684 and 1,826 square kilometres respectively. The territory of Mewat extends about 112 kilometres from north to south and about 80 kilometres from east to west. It begins approximately 64 kilometres southwest of Delhi.

One is never far from the bare quartzite ridges of the Aravali mountain range in Mewat. In most places one can see hills on two sides, and many areas are surrounded

MAP I

MAP OF MEWAT SHOWING THE PALS



by hills. At about the centre of Mewat a fairly high ridge divides its Haryana and Rajasthan parts. The quartzite rock of this ridge is so bare that it has earned the name of *kala pahar* (black mountain). The *kala pahar* rises abruptly to more than 300 metres in places and is remarkably continuous. Other ranges which run parallel to it are discontinuous and lower.

"All the hills are dissected by generally dry but at times torrent-filled nullahs, and surrounded by pediment-fans."[1] At the foot of the hills the torrents form deep gorges and cause considerable erosion, which lays waste a good deal of the land. This area is used for grazing cattle and goats and is managed collectively by the villages. It also provides the much needed *pula*[2] straw for covering the houses and for making rope. Other wild plants in this area provide useful material for mats, baskets, and fuel.

The climate[3] of Mewat is marked by wide variations in the seasons. During the winter months, from November to February, daily temperature variation ranges between 27 degrees and 1 degree Centigrade. This is according to the official records, mostly taken in towns, but in rural areas the temperature must be dropping to the freezing point, for I saw a crust of ice on little puddles in the fields in January 1964. In the summer months, during May and June, the mercury rises to 53 degrees centigrade, with daily variation from 53 to 20 degrees Centigrade. Slow dust storms blow sometimes continuously for three days and nights, filling the air with thin yellow sand. There is an average annual precipitation of about 65 cm., 93 per cent of which is caused by the southwest monsoon in the months of June to September. The soils in the area range from sandy in parts of Alwar to sedimentary clay in

1. O. H. K. Spate, *India and Pakistan: A General and Regional Geography*, London, Mathuen & Co., 1957, p. 572.
2. *Pula* is the local name for a kind of brush which is used for many purposes in the area.
3. All figures are from the Rajasthan Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 1961.

Bharatpur. But in most parts land is fairly fertile and particularly suitable for growing wheat, grams, and mustard. The area is popular for mustard production. However, the land is not flat, and there are no canals for irrigation. The subterrain water level is reasonably high in most parts, and open wells supply the water for drinking and irrigation. But, in general, agriculture is carried on without any kind of irrigation.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE POPULATION

Mewat has a total population of about 1,181,089 (1961 census). The male-female ratio in the area is about 884 females to 1,000 males. The density of population ranges from 125 persons per square kilometre in Alwar *tehsil* to 178 in Ferozepur Jhirka *tehsil* of the Gurgaon district of Haryana, with an average for the whole area of about 150. There are about 2,188 villages in Mewat in which over one million, or over 90 per cent, of the people live. The villages range widely in size, from a mere 250 persons to over 5,000, the average being about 500. There are six urban centres in Mewat: two each in Gurgaon, Alwar, and Bharatpur districts. According to the 1961 census, an urban centre must either have a municipal government set up before 1951, or fulfil three conditions: (1) it must have a population of at least 5,000; (2) three-fourths of its adult male population must be engaged in non-agricultural occupations; and (3) it must have a density of population of 390 or more per square kilometre.[4] On this basis, the total urban population of Mewat is 115,199, of which Alwar city alone claims 72,707. The other five towns, which together have a population of 42,492, are Kherli in Alwar district, Kaman and Dig in Bharatpur, and Ferozepur Jhirka and Nuh in Gurgaon.

The 1961 census of India does not list the Meos separa-

4. Census of India, 1961, *Vol. XIV, Rajasthan; Part II-A, General Population Tables*, Jaipur, Superintendent of Census Operations, Rajasthan, 1963, p. 8.

tely. The decennial censuses of the British period listed the so-called tribes separately, but only in the 1901 census were the Meos separated from another group—the Minas. According to the 1901 census, there were 335,164 Meos in India, most of whom lived in Mewat.[5] In order to find out the number of Meos from the 1961 census, we have to turn to the breakdown by religions which is reported separately.[6] The smallest areal unit in this publication is the district. In the three districts of Alwar, Bharatpur, and Gurgaon, there were a total of 393,290 Muslims in 1961. From my own experience in the area, there are almost no Muslims in the non-Mewati *tehsils* of the three districts. Among the Muslims in Mewat there are roughly 10 per cent non-Meos, which gives us an estimated figure of about 350,000 for the Meos. Almost all the Meos live in rural areas. Hence they constitute approximately 30 per cent of the rural population of Mewat.

According to popular belief, 40 to 50 per cent of the Meos migrated to Pakistan in 1947. A Mewati leader, Yasin Khan, told me, "Mewat is ruined. Nothing is left. Not even half the people are left." It is understandable that he exaggerated when he talked about the number of Meos that migrated to Pakistan. As we shall see from the figures of Chavandi Kalan, it does not seem likely that more than 25 per cent of the people migrated. One notices Punjabi refugees—Hindus and Sikhs—in most of the villages of Mewat today. From the size of the refugee group one can form some idea of the number of Meos that migrated. In most of the villages there are only a small number of refugee families living alongside the Meos. There are a few small villages which were completely abandoned by the Meos and are now occupied by the Punjabis. In some cases, where one or two families of

5. Herbert H. Risley and E. A. Gait, *Census of India, 1901; Vol. I, Part 1,* Calcutta, Superintendent of Government Press, pp. 560-566.

6. Census of India, 1961, *1961 Census—Religion, Paper No. 1 of 1963,* Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1963.

Meos were left in a village, they have since migrated to other villages to be near their relatives.

In most of the villages of Mewat the Meos constitute the dominant land-owning caste. Other land-owning castes represented in small numbers are the Thakurs, the Jats, and the Ahirs.[7] Since 1947, quite a few Sikh farmers have also settled in the area. To provide the necessary services for agricultural, household, and ritual purposes, numerous Hindu and Muslim castes are represented. Among the Hindu service groups there are the Brahmans (religious practitioners), the Banias (moneylenders), the Chamars (shoe makers), the Bhangis (sweepers), the Khatis (carpenters), the Kumhars (potters), the Bairagis (a sub-caste of the Chamars), the Khatris (a Punjabi trader caste), the Sunars (goldsmiths), the Malis (gardeners), and the Dakots (low caste Brahman beggars).[8] The Muslim castes include the Mirasis (entertainers), the Sayyads and the Faqirs (religious practitioners), the Lilgars (dyers), the Sakkas (water carriers), the Bhatiaras (grain-parchers and innkeepers), the Gatraras (entertainers), the Ghosis (entertainers), and the Pathans (unspecified). Some of the castes have both Hindu and Muslim members, such as the Nais (barbers), the Lohars (blacksmiths), and the Jogis and the Bhands (entertainers). If a village lacks a certain caste whose services are needed, an attempt is made to invite such a family to the village.

DIVISION INTO PALS

The territory of Mewat has been subdivided into thirteen geographical regions. Twelve of these are referred to as

7. The Ahirs and the Jats are land-owning castes which predominate in the areas surrounding Mewat. Thakurs are a similar caste and are represented in smaller numbers

8. The Dakots are a caste that belongs to the Brahman *varna*. In spite of the fact that they are Brahmans, because of their profession, they are regarded as low caste.

Pals[9] and one as Pallakra.[10] However, in practice, all of them are equal in status. Nevertheless, the Pallakra has a connotation of being more recent and slightly inferior. There is no record as to when and why Mewat was divided. According to legend, however, the various Pals were demarcated in Akbar's time (A.D. 1556-1605). The different clans of the Meos often fought among themselves over territory. Because of these feuds, it was realized, their collective strength against external enemies was adversely affected. A conference was convened in which leaders of all the clans participated. After a good deal of deliberation Mewat was divided. Each clan was allotted a certain number of villages according to the size of the population. After the area had been divided into twelve Pals, the representative of the Pahat clan arrived. He was indignant when he learned that he had come too late. In his anger he announced that his area would be called a Pallakra instead. The Pahat clan was large and important. Therefore, it acquired the status of a Pal though it continues to be called a Pallakra.

When the Pals were first created they might have enjoyed some political autonomy. But with the establishment of British rule in the area, the Pals as political divisions were completely ignored. Mewat came under three separate administrative districts, two of which were princely States (Alwar and Bharatpur) and the third a British India district (Gurgaon). *Tehsil* and smaller revenue areas were delineated which cut across Pal territories. There was a further change in the boundaries due to migration across Pal lines. Today it is difficult to show the exact limits of Pals on a map. But extensively travelled Meos have a vague idea of the traditional dividing

9. Pal literally means "to nourish" or "to look after". Here it is used in the sense of a kingdom or a political division.

10. Pallakra has the same meaning as Pal, except that it signifies smallness and inferior status. The suffix *-akra* or just *-ra*, is commonly used in Mewat to mean "small' or "inferior", or both. Future references to Pal will include the Pallakra.

lines. People claim to know the number of villages in each Pal, but the figures are legendary and unreliable. However, these figures are still frequently used by the Meos. For example, at a funeral feast a person may invite all the "757 villages" of his Pal.

The Pals are clustered into four groups, each of which bears a Rajput *vamsh* (clan) name. Likewise, the Pallakra is associated with a famous Rajput *vamsh*. It is claimed that members of the Pals have descended from the Rajput clans with whose names they are associated. The *vamsh* and their related Pals are listed in Table 1. With regard to the Pal and *vamsh* there is a fair amount of agreement among my Meo informants as also between published sources.[11] The Pals vary in land area and the number of vill-

TABLE 1

Names of vamsh *and their related Pals*

Name of vamsh	*Names of related Pals*
Tomar	Balot
	Dairval
	Landavat
	Ratavat
Jadu	Chhiraklot
	Demrot
	Duhlot
	Nai
	Pundlot
Kachhava	Dehngal
	Singhal
Rathor	Kalesa
Chauhan	Pahat

11. See Captain A. D. Bannerman, *Census of India, 1901; Vol, XXV, Part 1*, Lucknow, Newal Kishore Press, 1902. Also, Maulvi Abdul Shakur Mewati, *Tarikhee-Mewat wa Halat-e-Mewan*, (in

Pal and by the size of territory.
the Pals by the number of villages believed to be in each
ages contained in each. Table 2 gives the rank order of

TABLE 2

Rank order of Pals
by number of villages and by size of territory

Pals ranked by number of villages (in parentheses)			*Pals ranked by size of territory*
1.	Demrot	(757)	1. Chhiraklot
2.	Chhiraklot	(386)	2. Duhlot
3.	Dehngal	(360)	3. Pahat
4.	Landavat	(355)	4. Dehngal
5.	Pahat	(360)	5. Landavat
6.	Duhlot	(352)	6. Nai
7.	Nai	(210)	7. Demrot
8.	Singhal	(210)	8. Singhal
9.	Pundlot	(84)	9. Pundlot
10.	Dairval	(82)	10. Ratavat
11.	Balot	(12)	11. Dairval
12.	Ratavat	(12)	12. Kalesa
13.	Kalesa	(12)	13. Balot

In each Pal its own members predominate, but often there are members of other Pals living within its territory. This is due to migration. Also, in each Pal there live a number of other Meos who are called *nepalias*,[12] i.e., those who have no Pal. The *nepalias* belong to one of

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Urdu) Delhi, Faiz Am Press. 1928; S. P. Ruhela, "Alwar Jile ka Meo Samudae", (in Hindi) in *Jan Jagrati*, Vol. II, 1964, pp. 12-48. J. Forbes Watson and John W. Kaye (eds.), *The People of India, Vol. IV*, London, India Museum, 1869.

12. In spite of the large number of *gotras* of the *nepalias*, their total number is much smaller than that of the members of Pals.

the sixty-seven or more exogamous *gotra*[13] divisions. (See Appendix II.) The Pals and the *gotras* are all exogamous. Between *gotras* and Pals there are two main differences: (1) Pals have a territory and *gotras* do not, and (2) Pals are usually larger than *gotras* except for the three very small Pals. There is no real status difference between the members of Pals and the *nepalias*. Nevertheless, when relatives get together the nepalias are teased for not having a Pal.

Pals are subdivided into *thamas*, each of which is believed to have descended from a single ancestor. One of my informants told me: "The founder of Chhiraklot Pal was named Chhirak. The *thamas* of that Pal are named after the sons of Chhirak: Kotia, Bara, Banvaria, Utavaria." People belonging to the same *thama* feel closely related. In case of inter-*thama* disputes attempts are made to elicit the support of all the villages of the *thama*. But such attempts are no longer effective. Also, members of a *thama* usually avoid marrying their sons in these villages where other members of the *thama* marry their daughters. This is an extension of a rule which applies to villages. However, this rule is no longer strictly observed.

Each Pal and *thama* has a *chaudhri* (leader), usually a wealthy and influential man, whose position as head of the Pal or *thama* panchayat is hereditary. These traditional leaders, however, are neither recognized nor given special consideration any more.

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

An all-weather national highway stretches across the centre of Mewat. It connects Delhi with Jaipur and other cities in Rajasthan. Both passenger and freight traffic on this road is heavy, but most of it is unrelated to Mewat.

13. The Meo caste is divided into thirteen Pals (including the Pallakra) and approximately sixty-seven exogamous *gotras* (phratries). Members of each *gotra* are believed to have descended from a common ancestor. Meo *gotra* names resemble those of many Hindu castes.

A great deal of it originates in Delhi and is destined for Jaipur, and vice versa. Three State highways connect Alwar town with Tijara and Khairthal in the north, Rajgarh in the south, and Dig and Kaman in the east. There are a few unmetalled roads in Mewat which are usable only part of the year. In recent years, motorized road transportation has improved considerably in both frequency and efficiency. But it is used primarily by urban people. Villagers still either prefer to walk or use the conventional bullock cart or camel.

There are three main reasons why the villager does not use the motorized transport. First, most villages are situated at some distance from the road. In order to take the bus the villager has to walk to the road, wait for the bus, and again walk to his destination from the point where he alights the bus. Often a person can reach his destination in about the same time by trekking the country roads. Especially for carting farm products to the market town or to bring supplies from the city, a camel still proves to be the most convenient transport to the villager. During my stay in Chavandi Kalan, the villagers persuaded a truck owner to haul a load of lime and timber to the village. The truck got stuck in sand, and it took scores of men a whole day to extricate it. Second, because of the hilly terrain in most of Mewat, roads often follow circuitous routes. For the villager this makes the journey longer and more expensive. In the third place, most bus routes connect only large towns. Villagers do not have to go to these towns often. Most of the travelling is between villages, and people prefer to walk. They are quite used to walking and think nothing of covering forty to fifty kilometres a day. Not only do they walk, but they also carry heavy loads on their heads. Women often carry a small child on the hip and at the same time have a fairly heavy bundle on the head.

A number of railway lines skirt Mewat, but only one of them, the Delhi-Jaipur track, passes through the western part of the area. The Meos hardly use it. There are many people in Chavandi Kalan who have never seen a

train although there is a railway line only about thirty kilometres from the village. Since Independence, some Meos have travelled to Pakistan by train.

There is a post office in all towns and large villages in Mewat. But illiteracy prevents people from using this facility effectively. The mail service is used only for communication with relatives in Pakistan. In each village there are some Nais who, in addition to providing barbering services, work as messengers for their patrons. The Muslim caste of Faqirs is also used for this purpose, but they carry only sad news, such as announcements of death. Also, messages are sent through travellers who stop in the village to smoke the water pipe. For important purposes, such as arranging a marriage or purchasing an animal, usually a relative is sent.

The radio provides the villager with an important contact with the outside world. The transistor radio is especially useful in the villages for it operates on dry batteries. In the past few years, transistor radio has become an item of conspicuous consumption. In Mewat, there is the awareness that India and Pakistan are two nations, and the radio provides a medium of communication from one to the other. At times the radio is eagerly sought for news of religious festivals. In February 1965, there was some uncertainty about the exact date of Id-ul-Fitr, one of the two most important festivals of Islam. Both Radio Pakistan and All India Radio announced that the Id was to be on February 4. This date was accepted as authoritative.

It is evident that modern means of transportation and communication have come very near the Mewati village, especially since Independence. The Meo does not use them to his advantage. However, it is apparent that he is aware of the buses and trains and realizes that they are the best means to travel to far-off places. Now, travelling to Delhi and other cities is not a fantasy as it was in the past.

It is also quite clear that since 1947 the Meos have begun to use these facilities much more than before. One reason for this change is the need of the Indian Mewatis to exchange visits and letters with their relatives in Pak-

istan. Further, the Meos have established contacts of various sorts with the wider society, especially with the Muslims. The result is that it has become both possible and necessary for the Meos to interact with people and organizations outside of Mewat.

Chapter 3

THE MEOS

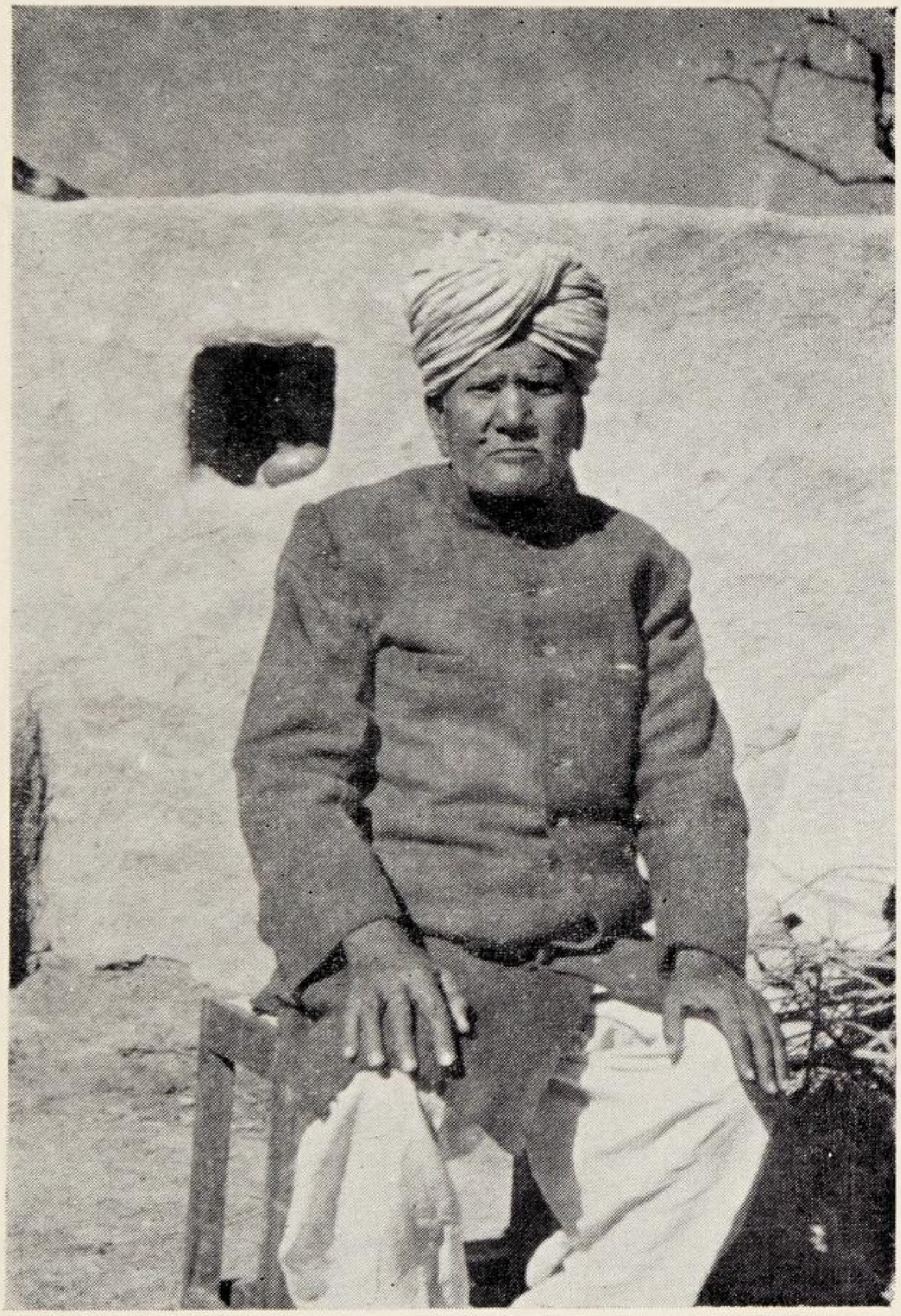
A TRIBE OR A CASTE?

MANY British and Indian writers claim that the Meos are a tribal group. Bannerman observes:

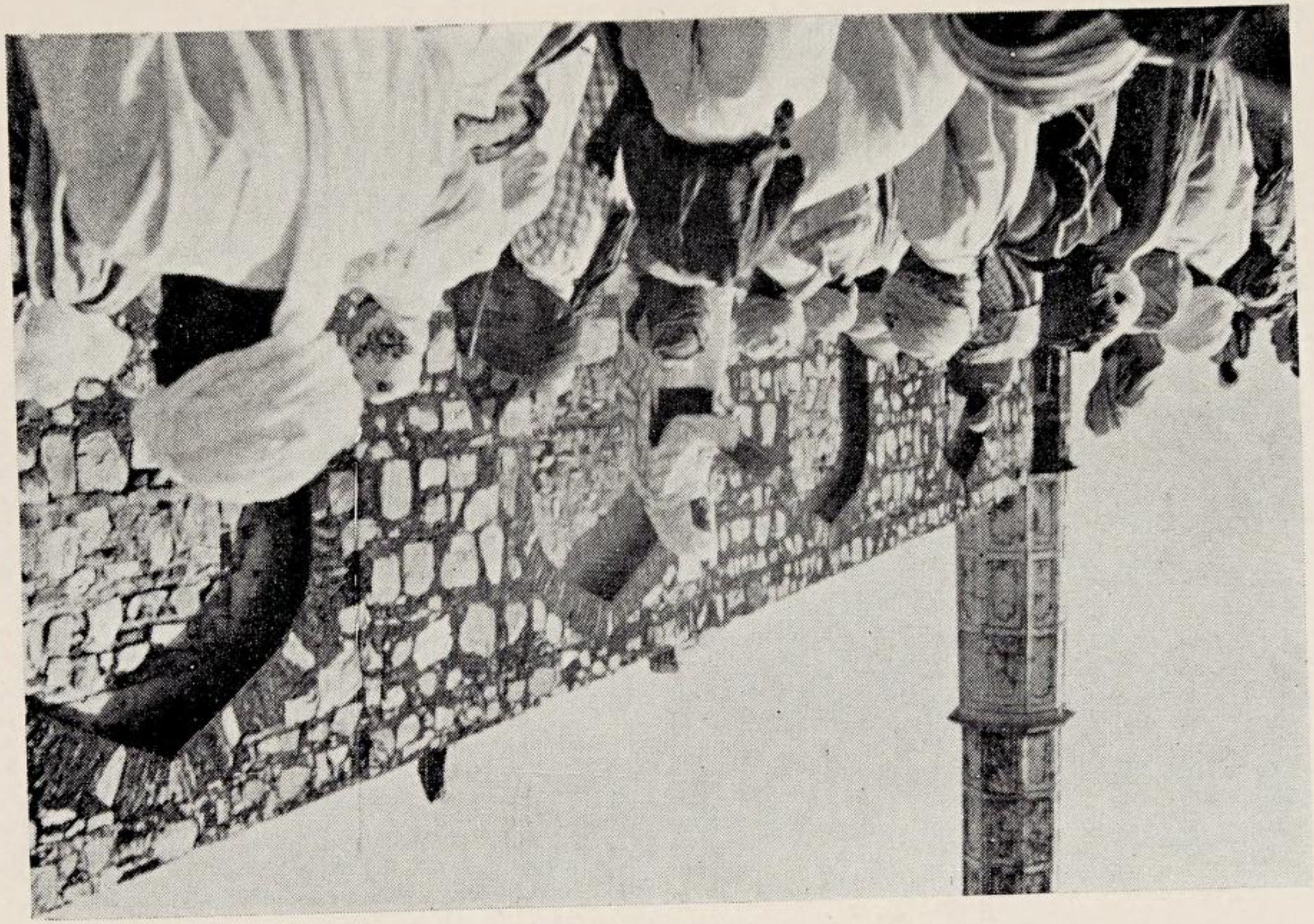
> . . . Colonel Powlett in his *Gazetteer* of Alwar writes. "the similarity between the words Meo and Mina suggest that the former may be a contraction of the latter. Several of the respective clans are identical in name (Sengal, Nai, Dulot, Pundlot, Dingal, Balot); and a story told of Daria Meo and his lady-love Sisbadani Mini seems to show that they formerly intermarried. In Bulandshehr a caste called Meo-Minas is spoken of in the Settlement Report, which would seem further to connect the two. However, it is possible that apostate Rajputs and bastard sons of Rajputs founded many of the clans, as the legend tells."[1]

Risley, on the other hand, characterizes the Meos as an "example of a tribe turned caste".[2] Speaking of the Rajputs, he says: "Except among the Meos and the Minas of Rajputana, where a strain of Bhil blood may perhaps be discerned, the type shows no sign of having been modified by contact with the Dravidians. . . ."[3] Crooke speaks of the Meos as a "robber tribe". He further claims, "They are a mixed race, in which Dravidian blood predominates."[4]

1. Captain A. D. Bannerman, *Census of India, 1901; Vol. XXV, Part 1*, Lucknow, Newal Kishore Press, 1902, p. 156.
2. Herbert H. Risley, *The People of India*, London, W. Thacker & Co., 1915, p. 76.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
4. William Crooke, *Natives of Northern India*, London, Archibald Constable & Co., 1907, p. 143.



Chaudhri Yasin Khan



The statements of Risley and Crooke that the Meos are a mixed race and are of Bhil and Dravidian blood cannot be taken seriously, since they are not based on reliable evidence. Powlett's reasoning of the relationship between the Meos and the Minas, based on the similarity of their names, is rather weak. Identical *gotra* names of the Meos and the Minas do not necessarily signify close relationship between the two. In Chavandi Kalan, a Chamar's daughter is married to a Tanvar, which is a Rajput as well as a Meo *gotra*. Because of the high social status of the Rajputs their *gotra* names are adopted by many castes.

The example of the marriage of Shashibadni Mini and Darya Khan Meo is used by a number of writers, in addition to the ones quoted above, to prove that the Meos and the Minas intermarried.[5] Since the Meos intermarried with the Mina tribe, it is reasoned, they must also be tribal. But, if we examine the circumstances under which that marriage alliance took place, we know that it was accidental and an unusual event. It certainly does not indicate that the Meos and the Minas intermarried as a practice.

Darya Khan and Shashibadni were engaged to be married before they were born. Darya's father, Todarmal Meo, and Shashibadni's grandfather, Badarao, were notorious dacoits and good friends. Once, after a successful joint raid, they got drunk and promised each other of perpetual friendship. Badarao's daughter-in-law and Todarmal's wife were both pregnant at that time. Badarao and Todarmal agreed, to strengthen their friendship, to marry the two children to each other if they were of opposite sex. The two babies happened to be of opposite sex and when they grew up to be of marriageable age, relatives on both sides tried to prevent their marriage. But Badarao and

5. See S. P. Ruhela, "Alwar jile ka Meo Samudae", (in Hindi) *Jan Jagrati*, Vol. II, 1964, pp. 12-48. Also, Jwala Sahai, *Vikaya Rajasthan* (in Urdu), Agra, Mufid Am Press, 1878; and Pinakilal, *Tawarikh-e-Raj Alwar* (in Urdu), Alwar (No publisher listed), 1939.

Todarmal insisted on fulfilling their promise. The marriage was solemnized with considerable anxiety. After the marriage, Darya did not dare to bring Shashibadni to his village—Dabak. Shashibadni wrote secret letters to Darya expressing her love for him and taunting him for being a coward. Darya finally came for Gauna[6] after a few years but a scuffle developed and he had to run for his life. Shashibadni escaped with him. The Minas pursued them and there was a big battle in which the Malik sub-group of the Meos was nearly wiped out. Whether or not this story is true, one cannot deduce from it that the Minas and the Meos intermarried as a matter of course.

After examining the various definitions of "tribe" in the Indian context, McCurdy states that to distinguish a tribe from the rest of the society some of the following criteria have been used: aboriginality, religion, physical type, and economic status. But he finds none of them satisfactory. He suggests that "we may define an Indian tribe as a group which is qualitatively different in culture from caste Indians and which itself is not a caste".[7] The Meos have the essential characteristics of a caste; i.e., a rank in the hierarchy, and hereditary membership. They are considered to be a caste by the Hindus as well as by the Muslims in Mewat. The Meos refer to themselves as a *jati*, observe the prevailing rules governing inter-caste conduct, and jealously guard their high rank.

Furthermore, the Meos are Muslims by religion, and they claim to have descended from Rajput clans. Whether or not their claim to Rajput ancestry is true, there is nothing in their cultural practices to suggest that they are not a caste. Their place in the caste structure and their religion are the strong features that show that they are not a tribe.

6. The ceremony when the husband comes to take his wife formally to his village, sometimes several years after marriage.

7. David W. McCurdy, *A Bhil Village of Rajasthan*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1964, p. 479.

Another fact will substantiate this point. Article 332 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the scheduled tribes[8] representation in the Central as well as in the State legislature for a period of ten years after the Constitution came into force. Under this provision, in each State a list of scheduled tribes was drawn up. But the Meos are not included in any of the lists. The Minas, however, are treated as a scheduled tribe in Rajasthan.

INVOLVEMENT IN DELHI POLITICS

While tracing their history, the Meos tend to look back to the pre-British times, particularly the Moghul and the Sultanate periods. A hundred years of British rule in India seems insignificant in comparison with the preceding four centuries. A probable reason is that the Meos were politically very active before the British took over India. Mewat was an autonomous little state with a great deal of decentralization of power. In every village there was a panchayat with influential people as its members; in many instances, but not always, the panchayat leadership was hereditary. The next higher council was the *thama* panchayat, representing a group of villages. The Pal panchayat came next with several *thamas* under its jurisdiction. The rulers of Mewat had to respect the views of the panchayat leaders because of the latter's influence with their people.

The people of Mewat not only participated in the three-tier panchayat politics, but through their rulers they felt quite involved in events at Delhi. The pattern of Mewati involvement in Delhi's activities was through political

8. Scattered throughout India are scores of groups of people whose culture is different from that of Hindu society. These groups have been referred to by various writers as "Adivasis", "Aboriginals", or "Tribals". The Indian Constitution grants certain privileges to these people, and in order to avoid confusion each State in the Indian Union was asked to draw up a list of tribes living within its territory. These lists are called "schedules", and any group whose name appears on any of the schedules is referred to as a "Scheduled Tribe".

alignments with officials in the capital city. Meo rulers often accepted military and civil assignments in the service of Delhi kings. Since accessions to the Delhi throne were frequently preceded by intrigue, the Meos invariably found themselves involved in them. At times, they backed the wrong horse and suffered bloody reprisals. Being near Delhi and well fortified by the Aravali hills, Mewat was frequently sought as a refuge by the defeated generals as well as by the ambitious princes plotting against their older brothers.

Also, a large number of Meos found employment in Delhi as soldiers, messengers, mail-runners, and administrators. They seem to be reputed as fast and reliable mail-runners, and also as good intelligence men. Employment outside of Mewat provided economic gain as well as contact with Delhi, the key centre of political and cultural activity during the period.

A well-recorded period of Mewati history dates back to the turn of the fifteenth century. Mewat was ruled by Bahadur Nahar from his capital at Hindwar nestled in the Aravali hills. Ruins of a large castle and other buildings, now popularly called Indore, can still be seen there. When Bahadur Nahar was at the zenith of his power, the Sultan of Delhi, Ferozeshah Tughlaq, died. His death was followed by intrigue for succession into which the Mewati ruler was drawn. For about 12 years Bahadur Nahar played an active role in the political drama at Delhi and was finally killed in a battle in A.D. 1405.[9] His two grandsons, Jallu and Kaddu, succeeded him and continued to take active interest in Delhi politics until about A.D. 1428 when Kaddu died.

We hear of the Meos next in the year 1526 when Babar the Moghul attacked India and, in the important battle of Kanva, Hasan Khan Mewati fought against him on the side of Rana Sanga. Even today bards in Mewat sing in

9. A. Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty*, Calcutta, Thacker, Spink, 1963, p. 448.

praise of Hasan Khan Mewati and relate his story. During the Moghul rule in Delhi (1526-1707) the Meos continued to be active although the intrigues of the earlier Sultanate period were absent. Knowledge of history of the ordinary Mewati is quite impressive, the key instructors being the wandering minstrels who are generously rewarded in Mewat.

CONVERSION TO ISLAM

Opinions regarding the time and manner of Meos' conversion to Islam differ. An educated Meo told me: "The Meos were first converted to Islam, together with the Minas, soon after the invasion of Muhammad-bin-Kasim [A.D. 711]. Afterwards, the Meos and the Minas reverted to Hinduism. Balban converted the Meos again [A.D. 1266-1287], and this time the Rajputs prevented the Minas from intermarrying with the Meos because of their religion." Another Meo, who had studied history at the Aligarh Muslim University, thinks that the Meos were first converted by Balban: "Balban attacked Mewat, killed about 100,000 men, and converted the rest to Islam by force."

Many Meos believe that they were converted to Islam by Salar Masud, who was the son of a sister of Mahmud Ghazni and was born in A.D. 1015 at Ajmer. Salar Masud is known for his bravery and religious zeal, which at times exceeded that of his uncle Mahmud. Masud died, as the legend goes, at the young age of nineteen, but during his time he was one of the most trusted and outstanding generals of Mahmud's army. In Mewat the name of Solar Masud is held in great esteem. Until recently the Meos used to swear by Salar in the courts. Watson and Kaye state that while the Meos "profess to be Mussulmans, they have great veneration for a local saint, Salar, by whom they swear. Salar is a Mussulman name, and may probably be that of the person by whom their conversion, such as it is, was made."[10] Salar Masud lived and

10. J. Forbes Watson and John W. Kaye (eds.), *The People of India*, Vol. VII, London, India Museum, 1874, Item 350.

fought in and around Mewat, and it is possible that he had some hand in converting the Meos to Islam.

Some Meos think that it was the Moghul king Aurangzeb (A.D. 1658-1707) who had converted them. An informant in Chavandi Kalan said: "We are *khal-kate Musalman*. During the reign of Aurangzeb we were persecuted and converted to Islam. This is the reason why even today our customs are more like those of the Hindus than of the Muslims." The phrase *khal-kate Musalman* means those who are Muslim only "because they are circumcised" or, more literally, "because they got a piece of skin cut off". Watson and Kaye agree that Aurangzeb had some part in the conversion of the Meos. They think that the conversion of the Meos was "probably the work of Emperor Ferozeshah Tughlaq, in the fourteenth century, when so many other tribes were forcibly made Mahommedans; and that Aurangzeb completed what was then begun."[11]

Bahadur Nahar, whom we have mentioned earlier, was a Hindu Rajput chief, converted to Islam during the reign of Ferozeshah Tughlaq.[12] He founded a sub-group of the Meos, called the Khanzadas, who continued to be a privileged group in Mewat until 1947, when they all migrated to Pakistan. There is evidence to show that the Khanzadas were more Islamized than the rest of the Meos. Their dress, names, and customs had undergone more change than those of the other Meos. Perhaps because of this and also because of the difference in their economic and social status, the two groups had stopped intermarriages. There are popular legends of Khanzada girls having been married into Meo families, but because of their different upbringing they always had difficulties in adjusting to the farm work the Meo women had to do.

It is evident that the Khanzadas constituted a distinct

11. J. Forbes Watson and John W. Kaye, (eds.), *The People of India*, Vol. IV, London, India Museum, 1869, Item 202.
12. A. Mahdi Husain, *op. cit.*, p. 448, footnote 3.

group among the Meos. However, the fact that they were converted to Islam in the fifteenth century does not imply that all the Meos were converted also at that time. On the contrary, greater Islamization of the Khanzadas in contrast with other Meos would indicate that all the Meos were not converted to Islam at the same time as the Khanzadas.

Another view of the Meos' conversion to Islam is that their various *gotras* and Pals adopted Islam at different times. It is claimed that the different *gotras* belonged to different Hindu castes before their conversion to Islam. Most of the *gotras* are believed to have originated from the Rajputs, which perhaps constituted the core group, but some are more akin to the Minas. According to popular belief, the members of one Meo *gotra,* Bamnavat, were Brahmans before conversion. Another *gotra,* Goripathan, which is a Muslim name, has a rather low origin from the caste of the Bhatiaras (grain-parchers).

This view that the Meos originated from different Hindu castes and were converted at different times is further strengthened by the case of the Pahats. According to a knowledgeable Meo informant, the Pahats, who were originally Nirman Thakurs, were converted to Islam very late. A community of Nirman Thakurs came into open conflict with a Gujar[13] group over the latter's desire to marry a Nirman girl. The Muslim ruler intervened and forced them to become Muslim. This happened, allegedly, at the time of Akbar in the sixteenth century, and by this time most of the Meos had already been converted. Furthermore, regarding the Singhal Pal of the Meos, the Mirasi entertainers even today sing in praise of their brave ancestor Isardas, who refused the Muslim king's request to marry his daughter to the king and to accept Islam. Even today the Meos take pride in their ancestors' resistance to Islam. When the Mirasis sing praises

13. The Gujars are a Hindu caste, but in some parts of India they are Muslim.

of their ancestors, their Meo patrons reward them generously.

The idea that the Meos were converted to Islam over a long period of time and that they originated from several Hindu castes and from the Minas seems to be the most plausible explanation of the conversion of the Meos. The Meos, because of their active interest in Delhi politics, were constantly under pressure to accept Islam for its value as a useful protective shield. As more and more Hindus in Mewat were likewise converted to Islam, the Meos integrated these new converts into their own group. In fact, the economic and social predominance of Meos made association with them an attractive proposition for many caste groups whose position as landowners was not secure.

THE BRITISH PERIOD

When the British took control of Delhi, the Meos offered stiff resistance. Watson and Kaye write: "In the mutiny and rebellion, in some districts, especially around Agra, they were more troublesome even than the Goojars, adding to their original evil disposition the bloodthirstiness of Mahomedan fanatics."[14] The British impression of the Meos is reflected in a quotation from Sir J. Malcolm cited by Crooke, which states: "In the Punjab they [the Meos] are the boldest of the criminal classes, leaving their villages in gangs which sometimes remain away for a year at a time."[15] Hunter writes: "They gave much trouble to Lord Lake's forces in the Maratha War of 1803, while in the mutiny they and the Gujars were conspicuous for their readiness to take advantage of disorder."[16]

Derogatory comments of the British writers reflect the degree of Meo opposition to the advent of the British.

14. J. Forbes Watson and John W. Kaye (eds.), *The People of India*, Vol. IV, op. cit., Item 202.
15. William Crooke, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144.
16. William Wilson Hunter, *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. XVII*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1908, p. 314.

The bias of the British historians is evident: they were quick to stigmatize the groups that did not support them. The Meos took very active part in the first war of Indian Independence in 1857, which naturally irritated the British. Hence they were classified as a "criminal tribe" and soon afterwards extremely repressive measures were adopted to subdue them. Even today the remains of numerous police *chawkis* dot the area of Mewat.

I must end this discussion with a comment on what I said in my original dissertation. I naively accepted the British allegation that the Meos were professional thieves, and with the help of quotations from historical sources and interviews I tried to prove the point. I now realize that the British were biased, and since their judgement was considered reliable by most writers, they influenced everyone, including the Meos themselves. Here is an example of how a biased opinion of a dominant group can skew the viewpoint of a large number of people.

Chapter 4

EFFECT OF PARTITION ON THE MEOS

IDENTIFICATION AS MUSLIMS

AT the time of the partition of India in 1947, the Meos were well integrated into the Mewati society. They owned land and used the services of Muslim and Hindu castes. Almost all non-Meos in the area depended, directly or indirectly, on the Meos for their livelihood. The service castes received grain at the harvest time in return for their services. Thus, the traditional *jajmani* system prevailed in Mewat.

The customs of the Meos were predominantly Hindu. Their religious rituals were Hindu and were performed under the guidance of Brahman priests. There were Mewati versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—the two great epics of the Hindus. The Meos regarded the Hindu mythological heroes as their ancestors. On the other hand, their adoption of Islam was at best nominal. They practised only a few customs of the Muslim tradition, notably male circumcision and burial of the dead. They so preserved their way of life that they resisted any Islamic influence from outside of Mewat. Yet, at the time of partition, the Hindu castes in Mewat identified the Meos as Muslims and became apprehensive of their dominant position. The people outside of Mewat also began to think of the area as a potential trouble spot: a Pakistani enclave.

To understand this rather sudden change of attitudes we have to examine a series of events that took place in Mewat beginning in 1946. Throughout the British period the Meos were practically isolated from the rest of the Indian society outside of Mewat. One index of their isolation is their almost complete lack of interest in the education system introduced by the British. Consequently, in the 1920's, there were only three Meos who had any

college education. One of them, Muse Khan, was a medical doctor, the other two, Yasin Khan and Sardar Muhammad Khan, were involved in politics after a brief period in government service. Both the latter were pro-British and were more interested in concessions to the Meos from the colonial power than in the struggle for Independence. Of the two, Yasin Khan was more active and influential, and also less pro-British than Sardar Muhammad. As the freedom movement was gaining strength in the 1930's, the British, in recognition of his loyalty to them and in order to boost up his political importance, vis-a-vis Yasin Khan, bestowed on Sardar Muhammad the title of Khan Bahadur.[1]

Since Yasin Khan and Sardar Muhammad had no links with any political party and because of their general lack of interest in the outside world, Mewat remained a political backwater. Only in 1946, on the eve of Independence, Sardar Muhammad leaned towards the Muslim League, and he was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly as a Muslim League candidate. But his success was more due to his being a Meo than to his political views, for the Meos were more interested in remaining in Mewat than living in a Muslim state.

In the same year, a young Mewati, Sapat Khan, returned to his village in the princely State of Bharatpur after completing his education at the Aligarh Muslim University. He soon began to campaign for the Muslim League and for its demand for Pakistan. The Meos responded warmly to his campaign mainly because he was the "son of the soil". Sapat Khan talked of making a Muslim state which would eventually be a part of the impending Pakistan. Being strong and secure, and politically naive, the Meos could not realize that such a suggestion was impractical. There ensued tension which led to occasional communal riots in Bharatpur. The relatively well-to-do Hindus in Meo villages felt insecure and started migrat-

1. Khan Bahadur was one of the titles the British bestowed on prominent Muslims who were loyal to the colonial rule.

ing to the cities. The Chamars and other low castes, however, could not find enough work in the cities to earn a living and, consequently, returned to the villages fairly fast.

The Hindu rulers of the Alwar and Bharatpur States reacted to the Meo response to Sapat Khan's campaign by preparing plans either to convert the Meos to Hinduism or to drive them out of their States. Back of this hostile attitude of the princely rulers was also the desire to avenge the revolt of the Meos against the Maharaja of Alwar in 1932. In that year the Meos had refused to pay land tax until the maharaja stopped riding through their fields shooting wild boars. The best excuse to punish the Meos, in 1946, was to charge them with plotting to overthrow the government and to make Mewat a part of Pakistan or an independent Muslim state. Accordingly, the princely rulers started exaggerating the communal riots and small incidents in Mewat. They got the excuse for military action when the Meos panicked and resorted to violence on hearing rumours that Mewat was going to be attacked.

DISLOCATION IN BHARATPUR AND ALWAR

The Meos of Gurgaon district were more politicized than those of Alwar and Bharatpur. The election of Sardar Muhammad to the Central Legislative Assembly as a Muslim Leaguer made them even more aware of the current political issues. Naturally, therefore, Hindu-Muslim hostilities first started in the Nuh *tehsil* of Gurgaon. According to Tuker, a British military officer stationed in the area, communal trouble in Mewat started in February 1947, over minor incidents.[2] After March that year, inter-village raids occurred along the border of Mewat. Tuker reports that the following series of incidents began on March 30:

2. Francis Ivan Simms Tuker, *While Memory Serves*, London, Cassell, 1950, p. 315.

> . . . the Meos burnt the Gujar village of Kotah Khandeola. Next day the Hindus retaliated by burning four Meo villages—Sakatpur, Ghairatpur, Dehri and Gangani. On the 1st April the Meos responded by burning Badgujar, Bisar, Akbarpur, Kherki and Baghanki. Up to this point all villages had been evacuated before being burnt and casualties were extremely light. On 2nd April the Hindus started trouble some way to the south and attacked from the neighbourhood of Dharuhera, burning three Meo villages. . . . The Meos burnt in revenge Rathiwas, Akera and Ghatal Kalan, and on 3rd April, Naiwal, Sahrawas, Panchgaon, Bhurka and Dona Kheri. They also burnt what little had been left in certain other villages which they had earlier attacked. The Hindus replied by burning the village of Utaon.[3]

These inter-village raids continued for some months in Gurgaon, but there was no mass exodus from the area. In Bharatpur and Alwar, however, the situation took a different turn.

A knowledgeable old Meo of Bharatpur recalls: The Meos were quite secure in the State before 1947 and were treated by the maharaja with a great deal of respect. The trouble began when Sapat Khan returned from Aligarh. His father, whom the maharaja used to address as *chacha sahib*, was asked to advise how to check Sapat Khan. On his recommendation, the maharaja offered to appoint Sapat Khan as a *tehsildar* (the chief administrator of a subdistrict) with assurance of promotion to the post of collector in six months. But Sapat Khan refused the offer. According to Sapat's father, he used to say: "This is Meo land. The maharaja has no right to rule us. He is no more capable of ruling than I am. We want Pakistan, and we are ready to lay down our lives for that cause." His slogan was *Mar ke len ge Pakistan* (We shall die to get Pakistan). The maharaja consulted his father again and on his advice arrested Sapat and some of his followers. They were la-

3. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

ter released on bail. They, however, continued with their political activities. According to Tuker:

> Communal disturbance between Meos [Muslims] and Hindus started in Bharatpur State on the 5th July 1947. Some 1,500 refugees, Hindus and Meos (mostly Meos), started pouring out of the state at Biwan and Singar on the Bharatpur and India border. Before this there had been, so far as can be gathered, a few individual incidents. . . . The actual casualties in this disturbance do not appear to have been very heavy.[4]

Most of my Meo informants told me that Meo refugees from Bharatpur started entering Alwar and Gurgaon in June 1947. However, according to a former official of Alwar State, refugees from Bharatpur started entering Alwar in large numbers in March and April 1947. The Meos believe that their expulsion from Bharatpur and Alwar was part of a plot engineered by Bachchu Singh, the younger brother of the Maharaja of Bharatpur. They also believe that five princely States—Bharatpur, Alwar, Jaipur, Bundi, and Kotah—sent their representatives to a secret conclave to discuss the Meo problem. At this time, the States of Alwar and Bharatpur prepared plans either to expel or to convert the Meos. Most of my informants agreed that the first riots in Bharatpur were instigated by Sapat Khan, who boasted that the entire area up to the Jumna river would be made a Muslim state. His followers beat up Bachchu Singh, and Bharatpur State authorities used this incident as an excuse to deploy armed forces against the Meos.

An influential Meo informant, who lives about three kilometres from Alwar city, told me that in June 1947, soon after the *kharif* (the crop harvested in the autumn) had been planted, Meo refugees from Bharatpur started coming to his village. He and other Meos in the village opened their houses to these refugees and shared with

4. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

them whatever food they had. Just then he got a message from a Muslim police official of Alwar State that the government was planning to arrest all prominent Meos and that he migrate to Gurgaon immediately, which he did with his family.

The expulsion of the Meos from Bharatpur and their entry into Alwar triggered quick action by the Alwar government. According to a retired Alwar State official, about 100,000 Meos[5] entered the State from Bharatpur in the few months following the beginning of their migration in March and April 1947. This large addition to the existing 250,000 Meo population posed a real danger to the State. He said: "These Meos were not loyal citizens. They thought that they were the real *maliks* [owners] of the State. With their number bolstered, they began talking of a Meo state and started harassing the local Hindus. When the State tried to check them, they revolted. Then we had to take drastic action. Once an army unit of the State faced a mob of several thousand Meos in a battle and killed 10,000 of them. By August 1947, we either killed, converted, or expelled all the Meos in the State. About 40,000 were converted to Hinduism."

Another Alwar State official said: "Some Hindu refugees came to Alwar from Montgomery, West Punjab. Many of them were badly wounded. Some women had one of their breasts cut off, others were badly mutilated. The Maharaja of Alwar visited these refugees. It was a pathetic scene. The massacre of the Muslims in the State began after that, i.e., about August 1947. The Muslims in the State were soon convinced that they could not stay in India as Muslims. So, many of them agreed to become Hindu in order to continue staying in Mewat."

According to many local informants, a large number of the Meos in the Alwar and Lachhmangarh *tehsils* of the Alwar State were converted to Hinduism. Only a few migrated to Gurgaon, and some of these, later, to Pakistan. Some Meos of Lachhmangarh said: "We left the village

5. All the figures given by the State official seem exaggerated.

in August 1947, because there were rumours that the Hindus were going to attack us. On the way to Alwar city we heard that Thakur Raghubir Singh, the Prime Minister of Alwar State, had offered to protect us if we became Hindu. We went to Alwar city and got converted to Hinduism. Then we returned to our village. The State even provided free transport for women and children. The Hindus greeted us back in the village, but as soon as we chased their animals away from our fields, they began to say, 'These snakes have come back; they are still Meos.' But we were not harmed. Only some government officials treated us harshly for two years after August 1947."

The experiences of the Meos of the Tijara and Kishangarh *tehsils* of Alwar State were different. In these *tehsils* there were many families of wealthy and influential Khanzadas. They had a tradition of military service and would fight if attacked. Also, they were more Islamized and politically conscious than the Meos. The Alwar government, realizing that it was futile trying to convert the Khanzadas, killed many of them and drove the rest away.

In the villages of these two northern *tehsils*, there were no riots between the Hindus and the Muslims. Only in towns, such as Tijara and Kishangarh, did communal riots take place. Almost all the high caste Hindus in the village left for the cities out of fear of the Meos. The Meos attacked Hindu villages outside of their area and were occasionally attacked by the Hindus. But after 15 August 1947 (i.e., after Independence), the State troops came in large numbers and drove the Muslims out of the State. According to many local informants, the State army indulged in looting and merciless killing of defenceless men, women and children. Except for a few stragglers who were protected by their Hindu friends, all the Meos migrated to Gurgaon. They lived there for a little over two years. During this time individual Meos sometimes stealthily returned to their village to bring back some grain. But their land was leased out to the Ahir and Jat farmers from outside of the area, and the Meos were not tolerated.

SHUDDHI IN ALWAR

In Alwar, attempts were made by the state and the local Arya Samaj[6] to reconvert the Meos to Hinduism. The act of reconversion was called *shuddhi*, which means "purification". This is related to the Hindu notion of ritual purity and pollution. By implication, a person becomes ritually polluted when he adopts a religion other than the one in which he was born. Arya Samaj is one of the Hindu reformist groups which believe that a Hindu who has been defiled by adopting another religion can be purified by religious rituals after which he may be accepted back into the Hindu society. But in Alwar, *shuddhi* was organized by the state. The Arya Samajists were anxious to participate in it, but disagreed with the State authorities on the details of the rituals. According to a local Arya Samaj leader, *shuddhi* was not done according to religious rites. Brahman priests were employed by the State to perform the rites, but the priests, he felt, were more interested in fees than in the proper performance of duties. He thought the movement was a failure, in that only 500 to 700 Muslims were converted.

A State official, however, was satisfied with the organization of *shuddhi*. According to him, about 40,000 Meos were converted. He described the purification procedure in these words: "The Meos were brought to a *baori* [a public water tank for bathing]. Men were shaved except for the moustache. Their heads were clean shaved, too, leaving only a *chutti* [a lock of hair on the top of the head]. Then they were bathed and asked to participate in the *havan* [worship involving fire]. Meat-eaters were fed with pork, and vegetarians were given *charanamat* [ritual drink made from milk, spices, and flower petals]. Women were bathed in the pond and were made to wear sari instead of the traditional Muslim dress. Their *bali* [special kind of earrings worn by Muslim women] were removed.

6. Arya Samaj is a Hindu religious revival movement which urges Hindus to revive the rituals of the Aryans of the Vedic period (1000 B.C.).

Then they were allowed to return to their villages. For six months all the Meos in Alwar were Hindu. After that Vinoba Bhave visited Mewat and encouraged the Meos to practise Islam."

A Meo of Lachhmangarh, who went through *shuddhi*, described it thus: "While we were trying to escape from our village, we heard that Prime Minister Raghubir Singh of Alwar had offered to convert us to Hinduism. We went to Alwar city and were led to a *baori*. Six or seven barbers were present there. All the men in our group were shaved. We were allowed to keep our moustache. Our heads were also clean shaved, except for the *chutti*. After we had bathed adult males were given the *janeu* [sacred thread worn by certain Hindus].[7] Women were asked to bathe and put on saris like Hindu women. Their *bali* were removed. A *havan* was performed in which everyone participated. Those who had Muslim names were given Hindu names. One Meo was asked to clean a bucket and bring some water. Hindus drank water from the hands of the Meos and vice versa. We were told that Hindus and Meos were now brothers. We stayed near the *baori* for four days after conversion and saw many groups of Meos undergoing *shuddhi*. After this we started going to the Hindu temple in our village for worship. We also had *kirtan* [religious singing] in our homes. We began cremating our dead. During the six months following our conversion we cremated four dead." I asked him how he felt about it. He replied, "We felt bad that our faith was destroyed. But it was necessary to save our lives." Although none of my informants admitted having eaten pork, they said that the possibility that they might be forced to do so had horrified them more than anything else.

7. The sacred thread is worn by the so-called twice-born Hindu castes as a symbol of their spiritual rebirth. These include the castes that are classified under three of the four *varna* (major ranked divisions of the Hindu social hierarchy): Brahman (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), and Vaishya (traders). The lowest of the *varna*, the Shudra, are prohibited from wearing the sacred thread.

CHOICE BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

During the communal disturbances of 1947, Gurgaon district—a part of British India—was well protected by the Indian army and was, therefore, the safest place for the Meos: there they went when forced out from Bharatpur. Some tried Alwar, but soon discovered that it was no safer than their own State and moved on to Gurgaon. The Meos of Alwar had a different experience. In the southern *tehsils*, Alwar and Lachhmangarh, most of them accepted Hinduism and they were allowed to stay on. The Meos of the two northern *tehsils* of Tijara and Kishangarh were forced to join those from Bharatpur in moving on to Gurgaon. Consequently, the population of the Mewati *tehsil* in Gurgaon almost doubled by the end of 1947.

At first the Meos of Gurgaon accommodated the refugees in their homes and shared their resources generously, but soon the food supplies were exhausted and the houses were overfilled. The refugees started camping in the fields outside of the villages. There was not enough work for all, and many took to thieving. The civil administration had nearly broken down, and Meo leaders, in spite of their best efforts, could not prevent the refugees from stealing or help procuring supplies for them. The transportation system was completely disorganized, and acute shortages of salt, cloth, etc., not produced locally, were felt.

A Meo informant from Chavandi Kalan explained the situation thus: "There were too many people. The local Meos tried to help us, but they could not provide for all of us. Salt was selling as high as one rupee for a quarter *seer* [about 250 grams] Cloth was hard to get. Even foodgrains were not available. Money was of no use. Some Meos stole from the houses and from the fields. Yasin Khan tried to prevent this, but they did not listen to him. Some of us used to walk back to our villages at night and bring grain from our hidden reserves. But we could not carry much on our heads, and the risk involved was very great. Still some people made several trips. We knew the terrain so well that we could go unnoticed."

He continued: "Many men returned to Chavandi after

a year, although it was not safe yet. We found the Ahirs cultivating our land. We worked as labourers in our own fields. Some twisted string from local fibre. After a few days a police inspector came with some constables. He rounded us all up in front of the Bania's house. There were also a few women and children in the group. The constables seemed to be anxious to kill us, but the inspector was a good man. The Meos explained their plight in Gurgaon and said that they preferred being shot dead in their own village rather than dying of starvation in Gurgaon. The inspector had no solution, so he left us with a warning that everyone should vacate the village within the next three days. But we stayed on. Then the army came and pushed us out. The Pakistani army had by now come to Gurgaon to take those of us who wanted to migrate to Pakistan. A few went to Pakistan."

In spite of the hardships they suffered in Gurgaon in 1947 and 1948, the Meos hesitated to migrate to Pakistan. Yasin Khan, the most respected leader of Mewat, was also in favour of the Meos living in Mewat. He tried hard dissuading them from migrating. But some people left as soon as they got the opportunity—especially the Khanzadas, the non-Meo high caste Muslims, the educated people, and those who had lost members of their families during the riots and were too afraid to stay. The others hoped for an early return to their homes; but when they could not, even after a year, some farmers also had decided to migrate when the rescue units of the Pakistani army came to Mewat at the end of 1948 and offered escort to those who wanted to migrate. Many took this opportunity to go. An informant told me: "Yasin Khan begged of people not to go. He put his turban on the ground and said that those who went would trample over it. But many people left. One year of suffering was too much for them."

Life in Pakistan, however, was not so easy. Land was allotted by the Pakistani government to those who owned land in Mewat—and in most cases it was more fertile than the land they had left back in India—but they were not so-

cially accepted. According to Ejaz,[8] many Meos lost their lives because Pakistanis suspected them of being Hindus and killed them. The Meos had to change their names, their dress, their customs, and even their vocabulary before they were accepted as Muslims. In other words, they had to be Islamized and made to abandon their non-Islamic customs before they could be tolerated in the society. Some Meos were so disappointed that they returned to Mewat. But those who returned in the middle of 1950 or later, when others had already been resettled, could not get their land and property back: all evacuee property which had remained unclaimed had been allotted by the government to the Punjabi refugees.

There is some evidence to show that many of the Meos who went to Pakistan during 1947-1950 have since returned back to Mewat. According to the 1961 census, the Muslim population of the Gurgaon, Alwar, and Bharatpur districts increased by 32.45 per cent, 57.31 per cent, and 54.73 per cent respectively during the preceding decade, in which period the average growth for Rajasthan was 21.51 per cent.[9] Since we know that many Meos who went to Pakistan during 1947-1950 later returned to Mewat, we can safely infer that they account for a large part of this unusually high growth in population in the three districts.

Much of the immigration of the Meos had been by jumping the Indo-Pakistan border check posts, aided by professional smugglers for a fee. However, the venture was hazardous, and only the more daring attempted it. Those who tried to follow the legal procedure often had little success. Many Meo families were split in 1947 between Pakistan and India and some have not reunited yet. In Chavandi Kalan, a young woman with two children has been trying for fifteen years to join her husband in Pak-

8. S. M. Akram Ejaz, "Cultural Patterns of the Meo Community", unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Sociology, Punjab University, Lahore, 1957.

9. Census of India, 1961, *Vol. XIV, Rajasthan; Part II-A, General Population Tables*, Jaipur, Superintendent of Census Operations, Rajasthan, 1963.

istan. She and her relatives are illiterate; and unless she is brave enough to jump the border, there is no hope of her ever joining her husband.

RESETTLEMENT IN 1949-1950

At the end of the year 1949, the Government of Rajasthan made arrangements to bring the Meos back to Alwar and Bharatpur. Orders were issued restoring to them their land and property. Back in their villages, the Meos discovered that most of the houses had been destroyed and that their wells and other property were in a bad state of repair. They found some of the Hindu farmers and the Chamars still living in the village, but the farmers from outside of the area had already left. All the Meos who returned received their land back. The lands and properties of those who had migrated to Pakistan or had died were allotted to refugees from West Punjab and to the landless low caste Hindus. Where some adult males of a joint family had migrated to Pakistan, their share in the family property was treated as evacuee property.

The Punjabi refugees arrived in the area soon after the Meos had been resettled on their land. In the beginning there was considerable hostility and mistrust between the Meos and the Punjabis. One Meo of Chavandi Kalan explained: "The Punjabis came from Alwar side some months after we had been resettled. They camped outside of the village near the wells, and they cut our ropes to pieces and damaged the wooden fixtures. We were very much afraid of them. They were belligerent towards us and threatened to drive us out. But soon land was allotted to them and they began to live in the village. It did not take us long to make friends with them."

During the first two or three years after resettlement, the Meos suffered a harsh treatment from the government officials. Communal hostility was still fresh in the people's minds. The Meos hesitated to celebrate their festivals except quietly inside of their homes. But the Hindus and Sikhs sympathized with them and encouraged them to celebrate their festivals in the open. A Sikh refugee, who now

lives in Chavandi Kalan, told me: "The Meos were afraid to celebrate their festivals after partition. At Muharram,[10] the year after we came to Chavandi Kalan, some young Meos wanted to make the *tajia*[11] and carry it in procession. But they were afraid that the police would punish them. I told them to go ahead with their plans, and offered to lead the procession. The local revenue official warned me of the consequences, but I had already given my word. After the festival, a Sikh police inspector visited the village to investigate into the happening. He was told that the Meos wanted to start a communal riot. But I testified to what had taken place. The inspector was satisfied."

It may be noted that the age-old cordial relations that existed between the Hindus of Mewat, on the one hand, and the Meos and the non-Meo Muslims, on the other, were not much affected in 1947 at the village level. The Meos' conversion to Islam had not changed their pre-1947 socio-economic position. As far as the Meos are concerned, Hindu-Muslim hostility originated in the cities and in the areas outside of Mewat. The Hindus in the region suddenly began to feel insecure on the basis of rumours, and then began to leave their villages. This made the Meos aware of their numerical predominance and their identity as Muslims. Most of my informants agreed that there was no killing of Hindus by the Meos in their villages in spite of the latter's superior strength. Also, when the Meos had returned to their villages in 1950 and later, the Hindus accepted them, and within a few months normal conditions were restored; even the Punjabi refugees did not take long to make friends with the Meos.

10. A Muslim festival to mourn and commemorate the martyrdom of Husain, who died in the battle of Karbala. His brother, Hasan, who had died earlier, is also remembered on this occasion.
11. Representation of tombs of martyrs Hasan and Husain.

Chapter **5**

CHAVANDI KALAN

LOCATION AND ECOLOGY

CHAVANDI KALAN, a village with 640 people, is located in the Alwar district of Rajasthan State near the Haryana-Rajasthan border. Before India obtained Independence in 1947, Alwar was a princely State under the rule of a Rajput family. In the local administrative organization, Chavandi Kalan is situated in the Tijara *tehsil*. Tijara village, which is the headquarters of both the *tehsil* and the Panchayat Samiti,[1] is about 12 kilometres to the north-east. Chavandi Kalan is about 100 kilometres from Delhi as the crow flies and about 140 kilometres by road.

An all-weather State highway, connecting Alwar city with Tijara, passes through the village Bhindosi, which is the nearest bus stop to Chavandi Kalan eight kilometres away. Tijara, a trijunction of mettalled roads, is connected with Chavandi Kalan only by country roads unsuitable for motor transport. The nearest railway station is Khairthal, about twenty-eight kilometres to the east on the Delhi-Jaipur metre-gauge line. Khairthal is also the nearest wholesale market town for agricultural products. One must go from Chavandi Kalan either to Bhindosi or to Tijara and catch the bus to Alwar or Khairthal for the connecting transportation for the onward journey. Because the soil in the area is sandy, the most suitable—and the most popular—means of transportation is the camel. Bullock carts are also used, but in the summer, when the sand is loose, these tend to get stuck. However, except when they have heavy loads to carry, people prefer walking up to Bhindosi or Tijara from where they take the bus. Most

1. Panchayat Samiti refers to the institution organized at the *tehsil* level throughout the State under the Rajasthan Panchayat Act, 1953.

travel is between villages for social reasons, and people either walk or ride camels.

Geographical Environment

Chavandi Kalan is only one and one-half kilometre from a fairly high ridge of the Aravalis, which rises steeply to about 300 metres from the ground. The land between the hill and the village is fallow, cut by deep gullies scooped out by monsoon torrents descending from the hills. Other hills of the Aravali range lie to the east and the south, farther away from the village. The hill near the village and the eroded ground provide grazing for the cattle and goats for most of the year. A number of shrubs and small trees grow in this terrain, from which the villagers make articles for the home and for agricultural purposes. Also, the hill is the source of supply of stone for house construction. Villagers have an emotional attachment to the hill as a shelter in times of real or imagined danger.

The soil composition in the area ranges from sand to loam, sandy-loam being the most common. For the most part the soil is yellowish-brown in colour and, where protected from erosion, is fairly fertile. It is particularly suitable for growing gram, wheat, and mustard. The subterrain water level around the village varies from eight to thirty metres. To the south of the village there is an earthen dam, built by the State government about thirty years ago to check soil erosion. Most of the cultivated land lies to the south and the west of the village and is protected by the dam.

Climate

There are three main seasons: monsoon, winter, and summer. The average annual precipitation is about 54 centimetres, and most of it is concentrated in the months of July, August, and September. From year to year the amount varies widely. In 1964, there was 112 centimetres of precipitation in Chavandi Kalan. Rainfall is crucial to the agricultural economy of the village, since there is very little artificial irrigation. It can make all the differ-

ence between famine conditions and a bumper crop.

Winter begins about November and lasts for four months until the end of February. During these months the temperature drops occasionally to the freezing point. The nights and mornings are very cold, but the days are sunny, with the temperature rising to 26 degrees Centigrade. The degree of cold varies widely from year to year so that plant and animal life is not quite acclimatized.

Almost every fifth year there is a crop failure, especially mustard and gram, due to severe frost. In 1964, the mustard crop was completely destroyed by cold. The health of the people is also badly affected by the fluctuations in weather, particularly due to low resistance power caused by malnutrition, lack of warm clothing, and inadequate housing.

The summer months from March to June are extremely hot, with the temperature rising to 42.2 degrees Centigrade during the day. The nights are relatively cool when the temperature drops to 20 degrees Centigrade or below. The severity of the summer is increased by dust storms which are quite frequent during this season. Sometimes the storms blow continuously for several days, filling the air with yellow sand which makes even breathing difficult. Except for a few trees and some wild shrubs that grow in the hills, all vegetation turns brown in summer. From the Aravali ridge one sees only brownish-yellow earth surrounded by hills and dotted with villages marked by clusters of green trees.

THE PLAN OF THE VILLAGE

According to one of the oldest inhabitants of the village, Chavandi Kalan was founded by a Khanzada about five hundred years ago. The Khanzada settled down with a Bania companion who is said to be the ancestor of the present Bania families of the village. It is believed that through the centuries the number of families increased to five hundred. This figure is an exaggeration, but it is true that before 1947 Chavandi Kalan was much larger than its present size.

The main settlement of the village forms a rough square of about 402 metres on a side. (See Map II.) In the eastern part it narrows down to about 210 metres. Of the total 120 households in the village, 98 are situated in the main settlement. Several winding lanes, varying in width from 1.5 to 3 metres, run through the village, with houses on both sides facing each other except a few pointing in other directions. The lanes are unpaved for the most part and have no drainage system. Some of them turn into drains in the monsoon season when rain water gushes down from the hills and flows towards the dam, southwest of the village.

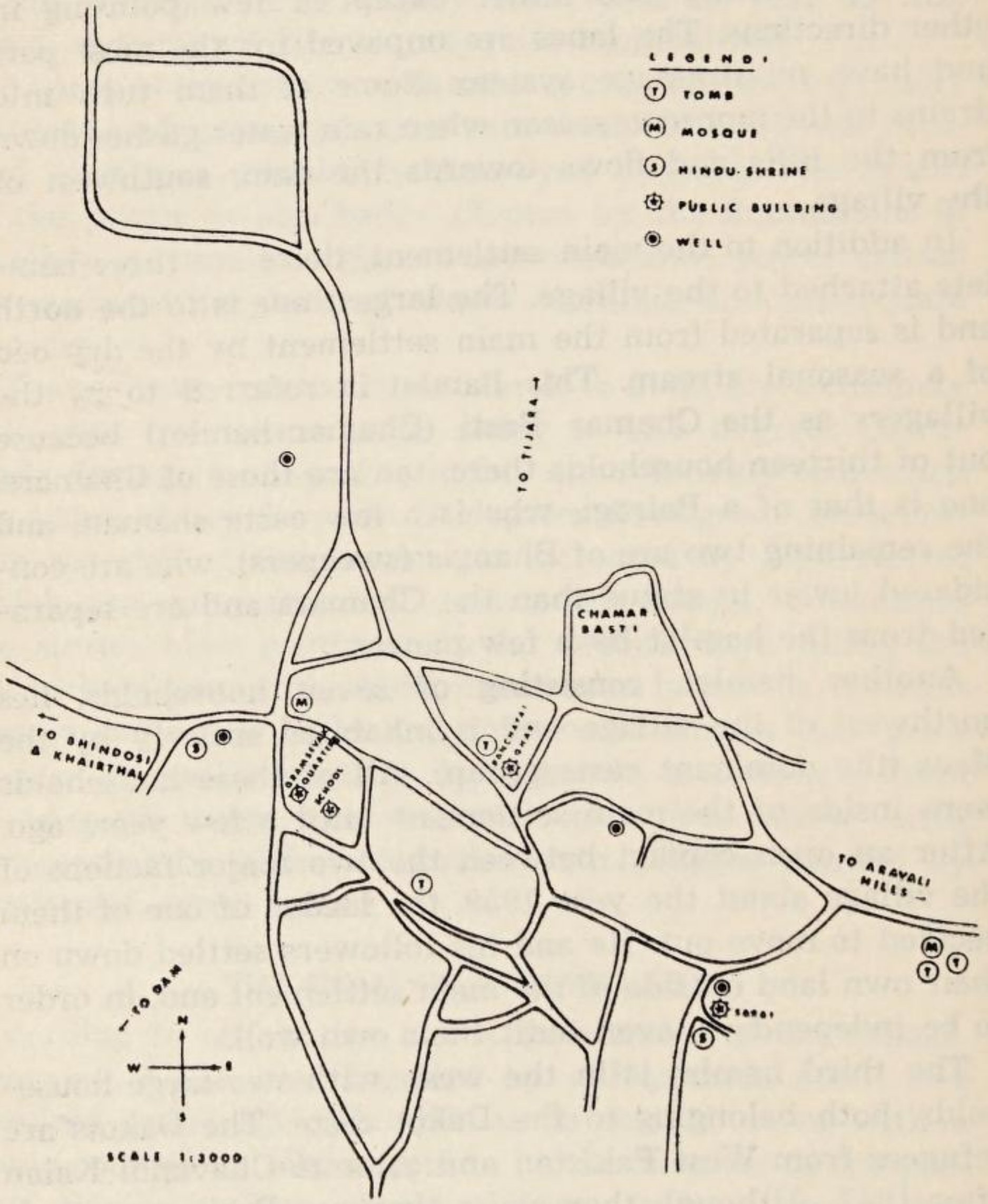
In addition to the main settlement, there are three hamlets attached to the village. The largest one is to the north and is separated from the main settlement by the dry bed of a seasonal stream. This hamlet is referred to by the villagers as the Chamar Basti (Chamar hamlet) because out of thirteen households there, ten are those of Chamars, one is that of a Bairagi, who is a low caste shaman, and the remaining two are of Bhangis (sweepers), who are considered lower in status than the Chamars and are separated from the hamlet by a few metres.

Another hamlet, consisting of seven households, lies northwest of the village and is inhabited entirely by the Meos (the dominant caste group). All of these households were inside of the main settlement until a few years ago. After an open conflict between the two major factions of the village about the year 1959, the leader of one of them decided to move out. He and his followers settled down on their own land outside of the main settlement and, in order to be independent, even built their own well.

The third hamlet is in the west, with two large households, both belonging to the Dakot caste. The Dakots are refugees from West Pakistan and came to Chavandi Kalan after 1947. Although they claim they are Brahmans, their status is considered very low. Their traditional occupation is entertaining and begging. Although they are now landowning peasants, in lean agricultural years the active members of their families migrate to the cities and work as

MAP II

GENERAL MAP OF CHAVANDI KALAN



entertainers.

Most of the houses are built of mud, with small pieces of stone in the foundation and the lower parts of the walls. The walls are plastered with a thick coat of mud mixed with cow-dung. The roofs are gable, constructed with the straw of the local *pula* bush. There are a few substantial stone-houses scattered all over the village. Most of them are in the centre of the village and belong to the Banias. Out of the total of 117 occupied houses in the village, 18 are *pakka* (built of stone),[2] and the rest are *kachcha* (built of mud).

There are two mosques in the village, one in the western sector and one outside of the village at the eastern edge. The one in the east is old and *pakka*. The other is *kachcha* and was built only recently. Of the two, the *kachcha* mosque is used the most. There are eleven shrines in the village, two of Hindu deities and nine of Muslim saints.

Four public wells supply water for human and animal needs. However, only two of them are used extensively, for the other two have brackish water. The big well in the west is considered to be the best and is most commonly used by the villagers. The Chamars and the Bhangis are prohibited from using these wells. They draw their water from a well near their hamlet, which belongs to a Meo and is used by him only for irrigation.

There are four public buildings in the village. One of them is called the sarai (public rest-house) and was built by a wealthy Bania as a lodging for the travellers. It is now occupied by a Dakot as a private dwelling. Another is the panchayat[3] house, which was built in 1964 through government subsidy. There is a primary school, housed in a *kachcha* building constructed in 1960. The fourth public

2. In Chavandi Kalan all *pakka* houses are built of stone rather than fired brick, as is the case in other parts of India.

3. Traditionally, a body of elders of a village or a caste. This institution has been formalized in most of the States of the Indian Union since Independence. Its members are now elected by popular vote.

building is the Gram Sevak's residence, a *pakka* structure built by the Community Development Department about ten years ago. Chavandi Kalan is also the headquarters of the *patvari*, the keeper of land records for Chavandi Kalan and three neighbouring villages. The *patvari* does not reside in the village, but maintains an office in a rented room.

THE PEOPLE

Of the 640 people of Chavandi Kalan in June 1964, the sex ratio was 121.1 males to 100 females. In actual numbers, there were 351 males and 289 females. The age distribution of the population is generally similar to that of the country as a whole.

Most of the adults are married and live with their spouses and children. A large number of families include three generations of lineal relatives and some collateral relatives. There is a total of 120 households in the village. A household is defined as a group of relatives who live in one house, cook on a common *chulha* (stove), and own property jointly. The households vary widely in size from one to fifteen members: 16 with 1 to 2 members, 52 with 3 to 5 members, 49 with 6 to 10, and 3 with 11 to 15.

Patti

The village is divided into six lineage groups called *pattis*. According to legend, the members of each *patti* have descended from one of the six sons of the founder of the village. Each *patti* is, therefore, known by the name of its ancestor. The name of the founder of the village is not remembered, but he must have been someone other than the Khanzada mentioned earlier, because the Meos of Chavandi Kalan are not Khanzadas. Since the village was founded by a Meo and since, until recently, the Meos owned all the land, only the Meos belong permanently to the *patti*. Others are considered temporary associates of the *patti* where they reside. All the Meo members of a *patti* are not always related to each other through the male line. Some families are descendants of female rela-

tives who had set up a matrilocal residence in a *patti* because of special circumstances. Patrilocal residence is the rule among the Meos, but a family may adopt a son-in-law when it has no male heirs. However, the son-in-law's children belong to his *gotra* and not to his father-in-law's. Sometimes, even if a family has sons, a favourite daughter and her husband may be given a piece of land and invited to settle in the same village. This is done especially if the son-in-law loses his own land or if he has insufficient land for his family's sustenance.

The number of households in each *patti* is not equal. The largest *patti*, Kabira, consists of 19 households, which together have 108 members. The smallest *patti*, Madari. has only two households with nine members.

All the households of a *patti* are not always situated close to each other. It is believed that originally they were in the same vicinity but that individual households later shifted to new sites. For example, seven households of Kabira *patti* shifted from the centre of the village to a new hamlet northwest of the village about ten years ago. As was the practice in British India, the Alwar State recognized the *patti* divisions and appointed their leaders as *nambardars* (hereditary tax collectors) for purposes of land revenue collection. But this practice has recently been abolished. However, the members of a *patti*, because of close ties of blood, tend to support one another in times of village conflicts and during elections.

Wards

For purposes of panchayat elections, the village is divided into three wards. Each ward elects one representative to the village panchayat every three years. The wards are divided on the basis of the contiguity of the households taking care that all wards have more or less the same voter strength. There were 289 voters in the village in 1964, and they were divided 107:90:92 into the three wards.

Caste Divisions

Sixteen castes are represented in the village—the Meos. four non-Meo Muslim castes, ten Hindu castes, and one Sikh. Table 3 lists the distribution of the castes. The location of the four major caste groups is shown in Map III. The Meos are the most numerous caste, and the Khatris the least numerous. Most of the castes were in the village prior to partition. All the Sikhs, two families of Dakots, and the Khatri came to the village after 1947. Most of the castes live in the main settlement. The Chamars and the Bhangis, i.e., the most socially underprivileged, have their

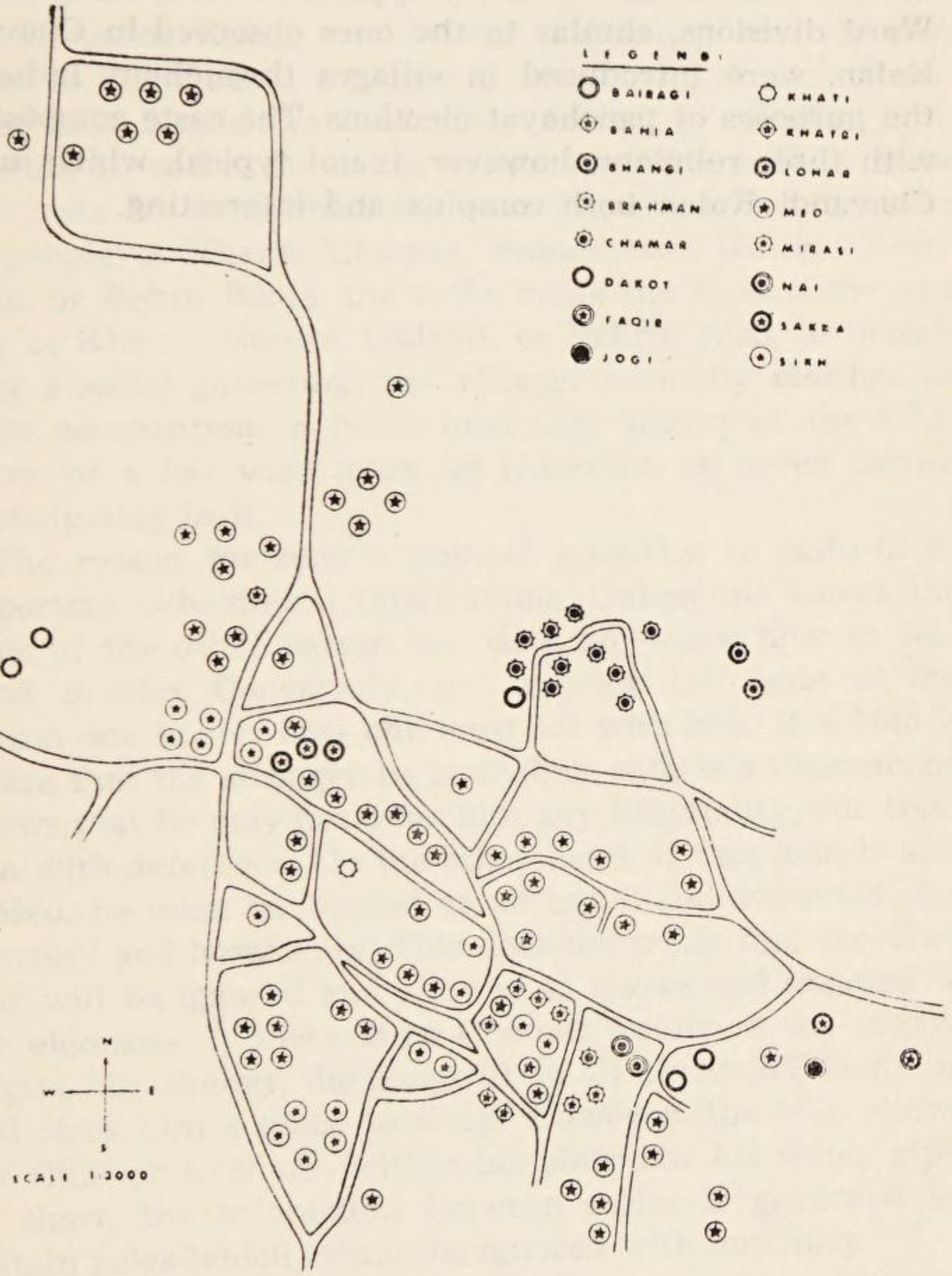
TABLE 3

Caste distribution in Chavandi Kalan by household and sex

Caste	*Number of households*	*Number of members*		
		Male	*Female*	*Total*
Muslim				
Meo	66	198	172	370
Faqir	1	4	3	7
Lohar	1	2	2	4
Sakka	3	7	5	12
Mirasi	1	4	3	7
Hindu				
Brahman	3	8	2	10
Khatri	1	1	0	1
Bania	4	12	13	25
Khati	1	3	2	5
Dakot	4	20	10	30
Bairagi	1	3	2	5
Jogi	1	4	1	5
Nai	2	7	2	9
Chamar	11	24	21	45
Bhangi	2	6	6	12
Sikh				
Sikh	18	48	45	93
Total	120	351	289	640

MAP III

LOCATION OF CASTE GROUPS IN CHAVANDI KALAN



own hamlet separated from the village by a stream bed Two Dakot families also live in a hamlet, but, unlike the Harijans,[4] they live outside of the village by their own choosing.

The layout and the size of Chavandi Kalan as well as the *patti* divisions are fairly typical of rural north India Ward divisions, similar to the ones observed in Chavandi Kalan, were introduced in villages throughout India for the purposes of panchayat elections. The caste composition with three religions, however, is not typical, which makes Chavandi Kalan both complex and interesting.

4. Literally, "men of God". This term was introduced by M. K. Gandhi to refer to the "untouchable" Hindu castes.

Chapter 6

THE CASTE SYSTEM

THE MEANING OF CASTE

IN Chavandi Kalan, one of the first things the villagers want to know about a person is his *jat* or *jati*, best translated into English as caste. In referring to familiar individuals as well as to casual acquaintances both their name and caste are mentioned. For example, one refers to names of people as Khemu Chamar, Sumer Meo, Gulzari Brahman, or Behru Bania, the suffix being the caste name, and not as Khemu, Sumer, Gulzari, or Behru. Also, in describing a social gathering, the villager normally clarifies its caste composition: a *barat* (marriage party) of the Chamars, or a fair with *saton jat* (literally, all seven castes) participating in it.

The reason for such a pointed attention to caste is its important behavioural implications. Unless one knows the caste of the other person one does not know how to respond to him. Conversely, on knowing the caste of the person one knows how one must act with him. If a Meo is aware that the stranger he is dealing with is a Chamar, he knows that he may not offer him any hospitality, nor treat him with deference. On the other hand, if that man is also a Meo, he must be treated as an equal and extended due courtesy and hospitality. This does not mean that the Chamar will be ignored and allowed to starve and exposed to the elements. If there is no Chamar family in the village to give him shelter, the Meo will, in all likelihood, feed him and show him a place to sleep. However, the Meo allows the Chamar to share neither his plate nor his water pipe. In short, the interaction between castes is governed by certain rules which cannot be ignored with impunity.

DEFINITION

The caste in Chavandi Kalan is a social group characterized

by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a place in the caste hierarchy. The sixteen castes in the village interact according to a pattern of rules and thus make up a social system. It is true that castes tend to specialize in certain occupations, differ in cultural practices, and exhibit peculiar personality traits; but these are the consequences of the caste system as we have defined it, and not its characteristics. Let us now see how the caste system in Chavandi Kalan works.

Endogamy

An important characteristic of caste system is endogamy. Inter-caste marriages, with few exceptions, are prohibited, and this rule is strictly enforced by all the castes in Chavandi Kalan. Violations do occur, but in such cases sanctions of varying severity are invoked, depending on such factors as the degree of rank difference between the man and the woman, the social standing and economic position of the parties involved, and the nature of the law of the land. Three cases of inter-caste marriage in the village should illustrate the way endogamy operates.

The first is of a Jogi-Bairagi marriage. A Jogi girl is married to a Bairagi boy in the village. Although Jogi and Bairagi are two separate caste groups, marriages between them are approved. The two are almost equal in rank: both very low. In fact, they were originally Chamars. when a person in each caste became a religious man and renounced his original caste. This is a well-established means of upward social mobility available to the socially underprivileged castes in India. Though not easy, it is recognised as legitimate. Both Jogi and Bairagi connote religiously inspired renunciation, and in these cases caste was the main thing that was renounced. The two castes are by and large endogamous, but till now inter-caste marriages do take place.

The second case is the one between a Jogi man and an Ahir woman. This is considered a serious violation of the caste endogamy rule, since there is a wide rank difference between the Ahirs and the Jogis. The former are a domi-

nant land-owning caste in parts of Haryana, and the latter are elevated "untouchables". It all began as an affair of the heart in another village between a young widow and the family labourer. When the Ahirs of the village came to know of it they threatened the lovers with punishment of death. The lovers eloped and got married under civil law. They were invited to Chavandi Kalan by the Bairagi relative of the husband. They have three sons who aspire to inherit land from their Ahir relatives and someday to get accepted in that caste. At present, the family does not own any land and is treated by the villagers as the other low-caste farm labourers. As far as I could observe, nobody in Chavandi Kalan is agitated over this inter-caste marriage. The villagers did not pay much attention except for their curiosity about this unusual marital alliance.

The third inter-caste marital alliance is between a Brahman man and a Chamar woman. Their marrige is not legitimized, but they live together, and have children. The villagers know that they are, in fact, living as husband and wife, but there is no serious opposition. The Brahman husband not only openly admits his relationship with the Chamar woman, but defends his alignment with "the rising caste" that has elected him to the village panchayat for two consecutive terms.

Endogamy, of course, does not rule out extra-marital sexual relations between members of different castes. For the high caste men to have sexual relations with "untouchable" women is not considered a serious offence. In fact, the Brahman-Chamar inter-caste marital alliance began as a clandestine sexual affair of a type that often occurs but is ignored. What is unusual about it is that it is no longer a secret and there is almost no opposition. But if a high caste woman has sexual relations with a low caste man, her relatives are likely to feel outraged. The Jogi-Ahir marriage and the violent reaction of the Ahirs clearly illustrates the point.

Caste endogamy is also restricted within spacial and linguistic bounds. This is well illustrated by the example of the Dakots of Chavandi Kalan. Two of the Dakot families

migrated from the Punjab after 1947, and had no prior contact with the Dakots of Chavandi Kalan. Although the two groups recognize the similarity of their caste, they are culturally and linguistically different. Consequently, even after seventeen years of residence in the same village there is no sign of their marrying across group lines. These two groups of Dakots, thus, still constitute virtually two separate castes.

Endogamy has the effect of insulating a caste group by intensifying intra-caste interaction and by restricting inter-caste contact. For a good many of the social activities, associated with life cycle rites, religious rituals, and recreation are performed collectively by caste fellows. Furthermore, since the members of a caste occupy equal social status, most meaningful friendships are formed within the caste. All this leads to cultural differences which become manifest through differences in vocabulary, ritual practices, names, and often in dress, house style, and food. In Chavandi Kalan, significant inter-caste cultural and linguistic differences are noticeable.

Hereditary Membership

Closely related to endogamy is the hereditary membership, the second important characteristic of caste. According to this rule, a child automatically becomes a member of its father's caste by virtue of the biological connection. Right to membership of the caste by birth is always honoured if the child's parents are members of a caste in good standing. Offsprings of outcastes, however, may or may not be admitted into their parents' previous caste. In fact, no legitimate recruitment method other than hereditary membership exists. Marital alliance in a caste other than one's own is likely to lead to punishment for both the partners rather than membership in one's spouse's caste. Adoption of a child across caste lines is uncommon, but when it does occur, the foster child retains its biological parent's caste. In Chavandi Kalan, there are cases of adoption within caste, but across *gotra* lines: invariably the child retains its hereditary *gotra*. Like *gotra*, caste does

not change by adoption.

Exceptions do, however, occur. It is noticed that the lower castes, especially the "untouchables", and also the *kamins*, do often accept high caste women through marriage. In Chavandi Kalan, the Jogi's Ahir wife is more or less accepted by the Jogis. When the Jogi was being harassed by the Ahirs, his relatives stood by him. Even the high castes make exceptions in admitting low caste wives of politically powerful people who can forestall social sanctions by virtue of their influence. When expedient, even large-scale inter-caste recruitment is possible. The Meos of Chavandi Kalan provide a good example of such an occurrence, for it appears that members of a variety of castes were admitted into the Meo fold. The members of some of the existing Meo *gotras*, for instance, claim descent from various Hindu castes.

Contrary to popular belief, caste membership is by no means permanent. Renunciation of caste membership by individuals is not unknown in Chavandi Kalan. I met several Sadhus, born and known in the region, passing through the village who refused to divulge their former caste because they felt it was irrelevant. Also, men and women are sometimes exterminated from their caste for violating caste rules. Some outcastes are later readmitted after they have propitiated the elders, often by feasting all the caste members in the village. Others spend the rest of their lives without any caste association.

Hierarchy

The third, and the most important, characteristic of a caste system is its hierarchical arrangement. Castes are unequal and ranked in relation to each other. In Chavandi Kalan, ranking is not done in terms of individual castes, but in clusters. The sixteen castes represented in the village, regardless of religion, are divided into three ranked clusters: the Unchi Jat (high castes), the Kamins (service castes), and the Harijans ("untouchables"). Within each of these groups the castes are not considered equal, but their relative status positions are ambiguous, and the difference re-

latively inconsequential. The composition and other details of the three groups are given in Table 4. Let us now examine each of the groups.

Unchi Jat (high castes): Five castes are included in this group of which the position of the Brahmans and the Banias is undisputed. The Brahmans and the Banias belong to the twice-born *varna* occupying the first and the third place respectively on a four-level scale. Furthermore, they carry on lucrative occupations of priestly work, trading, and money-lending, in addition to agriculture on their own land. Some of their members wield

TABLE 4

Caste hierarchy in Chavandi Kalan

Name of caste	*Occupation and description*	*Varna position*
Unchi Jat		
Brahman	Priest and farmer	Brahman
Meo	Muslim farmer	Kshatriya
Sikh	Sikh farmer	unclear
Bania	Trader and money-lender	Vaishya
Khatri	Punjabi trader	unclear
Kamin		
Khati	Carpenter	Shudra
Lohar	Muslim blacksmith	Shudra
Dakot	Brahman beggar	Brahman
Nai	Barber	Shudra
Bairagi	Elevated Chamar or leather worker	Shudra
Jogi	Elevated Chamar or leather worker	Shudra
Faqir	Muslim beggar	unclear
Sakka	Muslim water carrier	Shudra
Mirasi	Muslim entertainer	Shudra
Harijan		
Chamar	Leather worker	Low Shudra
Bhangi	Sweeper	Low Shudra

considerable political influence in the village. A Brahman happens to be the biggest land and cattleherd owner in the village. Consequently, he directly and indirectly provides employment to several families.

The Meos fall in this group of castes although their claim to the prestigeous Kshatriya *varna* is in doubt due to their adoption of Islam. However, this claim does not make much difference in their position, for other castes continue to treat them as high caste Kshatriyas. They retained their monopoly over land-ownership in the village until 1947, and remained politically dominant. In order to keep the caste system alive, they made significant compromises with the expectations of their adopted religion (Islam). They observed most of the Hindu rituals and continued to use the services of all Hindu castes, including the Brahmans, even long after embracing Islam. Since Independence, lower castes have both the land and the vote, so for the Meos it seems neither necessary nor possible to keep up the ritual facade. Hence, they are replacing their Hindu rituals with the Muslim ones. Yet, their place among the Unchi Jat, however meaningless, is assured so long as they own land and wield political power in the village.

The remaining two castes in this group, the Sikhs and the Khatri, have a peculiar position. Their *varna* connection is unclear and some elements of their culture resemble low caste traits. It is believed that until most Sikhs of Chavandi Kalan abandoned meat-eating and drinking a few years ago, they used to eat pork which is a low-caste food. The Khatri eats meat and has habits that do not agree with the habits of high caste Hindus. Yet both the Sikhs and the Khatri are treated as high castes. All Unchi Jats sit with them on the same cot, share Chilam (an earthen pipe for smoking tobacco), often share cooked food, and show due deference. Likewise, the Kamins and the Harijans treat the Sikhs and the Khatri as they treat other castes. The major factor that has helped in rank determination of both these castes is their owning land. In the absence of any clear prior association with a low rank, the fact of land-ownership by right tipped the balance in

their favour. Interestingly enough, the Sikhs and the Khatri reacted to the situation by conforming to high caste behaviour: vegetarianism, religiousness, and teetotalism.

Kamin (service castes): Out of nine castes in this group, three (i.e., Khati, Lohar, and Nai) are clean Shudras. They practise their traditional caste occupations according to the *jajmani* arrangement. The Nai has acquired land but not enough to provide a living. The Muslim Lohar also operates according to the *jajmani* rules. Being a poor workman, he has lost much of his clientele to the Khati, but his caste position has hardly changed.

The Dakots of the village belong to the Brahman *varna*, but due to their low occupation of beggary, they are considered Kamins. Though the two refugee Dakot families own land, since they have not given up their traditional occupation completely their caste status has not improved. They have a striking personality make-up, in that like other professional beggars, they cringe before the high castes. All this has reduced their chances for upward mobility.

The Bairagis and the Jogis are elevated Chamars whose ancestors abandoned their traditional leather work in favour of religious devotion which helped remove the stigma of untouchability. Now they are classified with other Kamins. Both are upward mobile and are trying to acquire high caste characteristics such as land, education, and clean and lucrative occupation.

The Faqir, Sakka, and Mirasi are Muslim service castes which serve the land-owning Meos by the *jajmani* rules. All the three castes are patronized mainly by the Muslims and are attracted to Chavandi Kalan because of the Meo Muslims. The Hindus do not require their services except rarely, and can easily do without them. Being old Muslims, and serving only Meos, their *varna* association is tenous. On the basis of their occupations and weak socio-economic status they are grouped with the Kamins and are treated as such by the high castes.

Harijans ("untouchables"): There are two castes of "untouchables" in Chavandi Kalan: the Chamars and the

Bhangis. Both are at the bottom of the *varna* scale, i.e., the "untouchable" part of the Shudra *varna*. They constitute the most deprived section of the caste hierarchy in the village. Their occupations require them to engage in tasks that are considered least desirable. The Chamars traditionally process animal hides and make shoes and other leather articles. The Bhangis do the scavenging, cleaning the cattle sheds of their *jajmans*, and skinning and disposing of dead animals. The members of both these castes provide extra farm hands during busy agricultural months, often at very low wages.

Because the Harijans are required to do unattractive work at relatively low wages, the society apparently makes attempts to block their way out of this predicament by piling them with insult and deprivation. They are treated as untouchable, segregated in the hamlet, denied basic amenities, given cast-off clothing to wear and leftover food to eat, and they are made to show deference to the higher castes. All these are low status traits and together they push the Harijans far below the level of the lowest Kamin caste, and widen the gulf between the Harijans and the Kamins. The Harijans, being weak, adapt to the inevitable and degrade themselves in the eyes of the higher castes. Naturally, of all the lines that separate the various caste groups the one separating the Harijans is the thickest and the hardest to cross.

STABILITY AND CHANGE

Caste system has worked smoothly in Chavandi Kalan, probably for many centuries. What is it that gave the system stability? An important factor seems to be cultural differentiation. Caste groups in the village are subcultures with variant norms and customs. This situation is brought about by endogamy and confinement of status-equal interaction within the caste. Once a caste becomes a sub-culture it develops its own mechanism of self-perpetuation and control of deviance. Children are socialized into the tradition and deviants are punished. For example, in Chavandi Kalan, the Bhangis know that eating of carrion

beef costs them loss of status, but they continue to eat it because: (1) due to their particular socialization they lack the feeling of repulsion for it, (2) being poor they see some advantage in exploiting this source of protein, and (3) if a Bhangi refused to eat carrion beef he would not only be considered a snob but may even be ridiculed and punished for making others feel inferior to him.

While it is true that mechanisms of cultural stability are quite potent, they are hardly sufficient to maintain a caste system, characterized by differential rewards. Compared to other castes, the Meos in Chavandi Kalan are wealtheir, politically more powerful, and enjoy higher social prestige. Knowing that the caste system favours them, they use their power to preserve it. On the other hand, the underprivileged castes such as the Bhangis and the Chamars know very well that they are shortchanged, but they are weak against the dominance of the Meos who control the land on which all the economic activity in the village depends. Since they see no way to improve their lot, they resign themselves to the inequities for the economic security that the system provides them. At least they are assured employment at a subsistence wage, and they cannot give it up in the absence of a more desirable alternative.

It is apparent that in the past the Meos used brute force to preserve the caste system. A couple of illustrations will show the manner in which they used their influence. A Meo informant told me: "The Sakkas of our village are a crafty bunch. Their ambitions know no bounds. They are uppity. In order to acquire land they are fraternizing a Meo family. They even allow their women to sleep with the unmarried males of the Meo family. They are doing this with a view to acquiring land. Before partition we would have beaten them up and turned them out of the village." The second example is also related to the Sakkas. During the 1965 panchayat elections in Chavandi Kalan a Meo and a Punjabi Hindu were contesting for the post of *sarpanch* (chairman of the panchayat). The Meo candidate was the weaker of the two and when he did not see much hope of winning the election he tried to make

an appeal to all the Muslim voters in the name of religion. A Sakka, whose sympathies were with the Meo candidate, used to give me a great deal of information about the activities of the supporters of the Hindu candidate, with the hope that I would pass the information on to the right ears. He could not talk directly to the candidate or his supporters because they did not listen to a Sakka who should not meddle in politics. This indicates how dominant the Meos were and how the lower castes were kept in their place.

In order to perpetuate the caste system, the Meos made real concessions in their behaviour. For several centuries after their conversion to Islam the Meos continued to observe the Hindu rituals with the assistance of Hindu castes, including the Brahman, at least partly to save the system which was so beneficial to them.

It is further apparent that the underprivileged castes understood well their plight and did not submit to it willingly. This is illustrated by the events of the post-Independence period. It is remarkable that as soon as the real opportunity for improvement was offered to the low castes they took advantage of it with great enthusiasm. Just before 1947, when the Hindu-Muslim tensions were mounting, and the Meos were still very strong in Mewat, many Hindus from Chavandi Kalan sought the safety of the neighbouring towns. The Chamars and the Bhangis were the only Hindus who did not leave the village. They took the risk in the hope of acquiring land in case the Meos left for Pakistan. When the State military entered the conflict and tried to push the Meos out of the State of Alwar, the Chamars became its allies. As soon as the Meos left, the Chamars grabbed their land. Although most of it was later returned to its Meo owners, some land belonging to the Meos that migrated to Pakistan was available for distribution. As a result, all the Chamars and the Bhangis were given land, in keeping with the government's policy of helping the scheduled castes and tribes. The Chamars abandoned their traditional occupation of shoe-making as soon as they acquired land. They are fast abandon-

ing low-caste characteristics and replacing them with high-caste practices: vegetarianism, ritual cleanliness, religiosity, self-respect, etc. The Meos and other castes resent all this, but they can no longer block the improvement in the social position of the Chamars.

After Independence, India adopted a democratic form of government based on the principle of universal adult suffrage. The people of Chavandi Kalan have participated in choosing representatives for the Central and State legislatures every five years since 1952. The underprivileged castes, such as the Chamars, particularly where they formed a sizable bloc of voters, began to realize the power potential of the ballot box. More recently, in 1961, when democratic decentralization in the form of Panchayati Raj was introduced in Rajasthan, the Chamars of Chavandi Kalan got their opportunity to gain political power. The Indian Constitution provides guaranteed representation to the scheduled castes and tribes. The Chamars of Chavandi Kalan took full advantage of this provision by electing a non-Chamar from their ward and by nominating a Chamar under the guarantee provision. They voted in great numbers, en bloc, exerting maximum influence.

We have argued that differential allocation of economic and political power is the key to the caste system. One might, therefore, ask why the Brahmans in Chavandi Kalan enjoyed such a high status in the absence of power? The answer is that they were supported by the dominant caste for their help in legitimizing the system. The Brahmans knew all along that their high status was rather artificial and without any real benefits. That is why as soon as the change occurred they collaborated with the Chamars to participate in the struggle for power. Of the three Brahman families in Chavandi Kalan, two have become land-owning farmers. One of the land-owning Brahman men has become the head of a political faction in the village and is deeply involved in the village politics. He is a member of the village panchayat and the majority of his electorate are Chamars. He lives with a Chamar woman in the village and supports the Chamars.

The head of the third Brahman family is a religious practitioner who has recently begun to serve the Chamars as their *purohit*.

Chapter 7

ECONOMIC LIFE

AGRICULTURE

ALL the inhabitants of Chavandi Kalan depend, directly or indirectly, on agriculture for their living. Land ownership is of crucial importance to them, and, as far as they can see, it is the only way to improve their economic and social status. Chavandi Kalan encompasses an area of 2,600 *bighas*,[1] or approximately 1,625 acres. About half of this land is fallow and technically belongs to the government, but it is used by the villagers for grazing animals and for obtaining wild plants. In the centre of the cultivated part, about 20 acres constitute the residential area where most houses are situated. To the southwest, a segment of about 50 cultivated acres is separated from the rest of the area by a wedge of land approximately 450 metres wide belonging to another village. The remaining 1,575 acres form one single block. The fallow land is at the foot of the hills to the east. Boundaries of eight villages touch those of Chavandi Kalan.

The land is divided into 1,366 small plots, designated as *khasra* in the *patvari* records. Each *khasra* is identified with a survey number in the *patvari's* map. The fallow *khasras* are fairly large, some of them as much as 100 acres. But the cultivated area is fragmented into very small plots, ranging in size from 0.06 to about 5.00 acres each. Many of the plots are less than one-half acre in size, and a vast majority less than an acre. One hundred and nine of the 120 village households own land. Each land-owning household possesses a number of small holdings, widely separated from one another. Most villagers

1. A *bigha* is a popular unit of land area measurement in north India, but its actual size varies widely from one locality to another. In Chavandi Kalan a *bigha* is equivalent to 0.625 acre.

have no record of the *khasras* they own. They can easily identify their plots on the spot, but few can remember the total number of their plots. I could find only one land-owner in the village who claimed to know the exact details of the plots he owned. He is literate and had copied the information from the *patvari's* record. On request he showed me the piece of paper, badly mutilated by termites, which he had obviously not handled for several years. Some of the *khasra* numbers were lost. Still, I learned that he owned a total of about 36 *bighas* (about 23 acres) in 39 plots (the smallest being 0.06 acre and the largest about 2.25 acres) scattered throughout the village land. The distribution of land ownership by caste and by size of holdings is shown in Table 5.

All the refugees, i.e., two Dakot households, the Khatri, and all the Sikhs, own land allotted by the State government. They had been landless tenant-farmers in the agriculturally advanced West Punjab and were attracted to Rajasthan by offers of land. The Rajasthan government hoped that these farmers would be able to popularize improved farming methods among the local farmers. Most of the local Hindu castes own land, too. The Brahmans possess a good deal of land. During the two and half years following August 1947, the Brahmans took advantage of the Meos' absence by claiming the land of disputed ownership. The Chamars and the Bhangis were allotted land by the government in keeping with its policy of helping the scheduled castes. The Chamars gave up their traditional occupation of shoe-making after they had acquired land. But most of them do not cultivate their land. They have no tradition of farming and lack the necessary implements and bullocks. Almost all the Chamars and the Bhangis lease their land to the farming castes and live on the income they receive as a share of the crop. Some work as labourers on their own land.

All the Meos own land, disdaining any occupation other than farming. Before 1947, they possessed all the land in the village. The attempts of the lower castes to purchase land, considered highly presumptuous, were thwarted by

TABLE 5

Distribution of landholdings in Chavandi Kalan by caste and number of households

Caste	*No. of households by caste*	*Number of households according to size of landholdings (in bigha*)*						
		1-5	6-10	11-20	21-25	26-50	51-99	Total
Meo	66	10	11	27	4	13	1	66
Faqir	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mirasi	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nai	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Lohar	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Khati	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chamar	11	1	0	9	0	0	0	10
Bhangi	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Bania	4	2	2	0	0	0	0	4
Sikh	18	0	1	16	1	0	0	18
Dakot	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Bairagi	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sakka	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brahman	3	0	1	1	0	0	1	3
Jogi	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Khatri	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	120	14	16	57	6	14	2	109

*1 acre = 1.6 *bigha*

the Meos. The Brahmans and the Banias could own land, but they never cultivated it themselves. There are cases where the Meos gave land to the Brahmans as a reward for their services, but the donor continued to cultivate it himself and gave the recipient a share of the crop. The Banias sometimes acquired land through purchase or as part of the repayment of loans by their debtors. But since they neither owned much land nor took to farming as a profession, they never posed a threat to the dominant land-owning position of the Meos. Furthermore, the Meos often bought back their land from the Banias or occasionally re-acquired it by force. A Meo explained to me: "We are never afraid of the Banias accumulating wealth or even land. Ultimately it belonged to us. In times of need we could persuade them to give it back to us."

The Agricultural Cycle

There are two main crop seasons in the year in Chavandi Kalan. The important of the two is *sadhi*, corresponding to the common north Indian term *rabi*. The *sadhi* crops are planted in October-November and harvested the following March-April. The second crop season, *savani*, corresponds to the term *kharif*. The month of Savan of the Hindu solar calendar signifies the rainy season in north India, as it is the middle of the monsoon season. The *savani* crops are planted in late June or July, depending on the arrival of the moisture-laden monsoon winds, and are harvested in September or October.

The most important *sadhi* crops are *chana* (black gram), *sarson* (mustard), *gehun* (wheat), and *jao* (barley). Of these, mustard is the major cash crop. The remaining three provide the farmer with the bulk of his foodgrain supply. Since both the sustenance and the solvency of the farmer depend on the *sadhi* crops, he reserves a major part of his inputs — labour and capital — for them. Every farmer tries to use as much of his land to *sadhi* crops as he possibly can.

The land reserved for *sadhi* sowing is referred to as *bhadvar*, and the one earmarked for *savani* is called *umra*.

Farmers plough their *bhadvar* land two or three times during the summer months of May and June so as to eliminate the weeds that grow in the hot season before they mature and drop seed. At the end of June, farmers cart the manure to the field, concentrating most of it in the *bhadvar* land, especially where mustard is to be planted. Before the first rain comes, farmers spread the manure and plough it under. But most of them do not start working the *bhadvar* land until the first rainfall. Ploughing is done across the slope of the land to check erosion. Throughout the rainy season the *bhadvar* land is ploughed over and over again whenever the weather is suitable. Most plots are ploughed about ten times by the time the *sadhi* crop is planted, though the ideal is twenty times. There is a saying in the village: "If you put 20 *maunds* [1 *maund*= 37 kg.] of manure on the soil and plough 20 times, you get 20 *maunds* of *sarson* per *bigha* of land."

Two kinds of plough are used in Chavandi Kalan. One is the *desi*, or the local type, which is a simple wooden implement with a steel point. The other is the *nag hal* (cobra). The *nag hal* was introduced in the area by the Ahir farmers who occupied it in 1948-49 when the Meos vacated the village. The difference between the two, besides the shape of their metal tips, is that the *nag hal* is lighter and is more suitable for sandy soil. Both the ploughs dig about eight to ten centimetres into the ground, and this partly explains the need for multiple ploughing. But since these ploughs are well matched to the pulling power of the bullocks, they have survived for hundreds of years in north India.

The planting of *sadhi* crops begins in early October. Black gram and mustard are sown first, and this operation is finished before the end of the month. Wheat and barley are the last to be planted, in November, after Divali (the festival of lights). This operation is done with the help of a special plough, the *nai hal*, which has a bamboo or metal tube with a funnel at the top near the handle of the plough. Seed is dropped into the funnel which falls into the ground just under the metal tip of the plough. As the plough moves

on, the soil from both the sides slips back into the furrow and covers the seed. One out of about ten farmers owns a *nai hal,* and those who do not own one borrow from those who do. Except for mustard, the *sadhi* crops require considerable quantities of seed. These crops are crucial; but most farmers do not save enough seed from the previous crop, and there is a great deal of anxiety at the time of sowing. The amount of seed required per *bigha* for the various *sadhi* crops is as follows: wheat, over 20 kilos; black gram, 10 to 15 kilos; barley, over 20 kilos; mustard, about 1 kilo. The Banias used to supply the seed to the farmer on credit at prices 10 to 15 per cent higher than the prevailing market price which itself is quite high at that time. At harvest they are repaid in kind when the prices of grain are at their lowest. The Community Development Department has since taken over this responsibility and provides the seed, still repayable in grain, at a reasonable interest rate.

Despite hard labour most farmers cannot cultivate all of their land. All *sadhi* planting has to be done within a month. The preparatory ploughing and the planting are such slow processes that there is not enough time to finish the work in a month in all the land one owns. Even with a good pair of bullocks a farmer can plough no more than three *bighas* of land in a twelve-hour day; most farmers average one to two *bighas.* Besides, obtaining the seed from the bureaucratic government agencies is another delaying factor. Consequently, a good part of the land remains unplanted until the middle of November, and by then most of the moisture evaporates. In order to plant the dried land the farmer must do *paleu,* i.e., water the land and then plough it before planting, something which very few farmers can manage to do.

After planting, there is little to do in the fields except keeping watch against wild and domestic animals as well as the common thief. Very few farmers irrigate their crops. In Chavandi Kalan, only two farmers own Persian wheels, and six others own and operate *chalas* (a device for lifting water from the well by leather bucket). Of the

two Persian wheels, one is owned by a Meo and the other by a Sikh. All the leather buckets are owned by the Meos. Each *chalas* is jointly owned by two or three families, since at least two pairs of bullocks and four men are needed to operate it. Because few do any irrigating, farmers are relatively free until the harvesting of *sadhi* crops in March. During these months social activities, such as visiting relatives outside of the village and attending fairs, take place. Many Meos use this time to visiting—legally or otherwise—their relatives in Pakistan.

The harvesting of *sadhi* crops begins in the middle of March. Black gram and mustard are harvested first, and wheat and barley last. This is the busiest season of the year. The farmers try to finish the work by the first week of April. This is imperative because the animals are let loose by then and it is impossible to keep them away from the fields. A *paer* (threshing-floor) is prepared in the field, preferably near the well. The harvested crop is stacked in a circle around the *paer* and is crushed by walking the bullocks over it. The winnowing is done by dropping the crushed plants from a basket against the wind which separates the chaff from the grain. Sometimes the farmer has to wait for several days for sufficient wind for winnowing. Most winnowing is finished by the end of May.

The second crop, *savani*, is planted in July, after a few good showers. Twelve to fifteen centimetres of moisture in the ground is necessary before *savani* crops can be planted. The main crops are *bajra* and *javar* (varieties of millet) and certain types of lentil. After the *umra* land is ploughed two or three times, the seed is sown broadcast. Almost all the grain is for consumption, and the stalks provide the bulk of the fodder for the animals. Since very little seed is required and only part of the land is planted, there is less anxiety concerning the outcome of the *savani* crop.

Crop Rotation

The value of crop rotation is well understood by the Chavandi Kalan farmer. The land where mustard was

planted in the *sadhi* is planted with *bajra* in the following *savani* season. If there is enough moisture in the ground after harvesting *bajra*, black gram may be planted in the same land. In most cases, after three consecutive harvests a plot is left fallow in order to recuperate the exhausted nitrogen, etc. In addition, it is heavily manured for *sadhi* crops when, depending on its condition, mustard or wheat is planted. However, all the land cannot be rotated. Part of the land, which is situated near the dam, becomes water-logged during the monsoon season. This land is planted only once a year, and wheat or barley is grown year after year. The yield in this land is usually good because of the silt deposited by the rain water from the hills. Also, in many cases the farmer is not able to plant all the land which was under *savani* cultivation for lack of moisture or for lack of time to prepare the land. Thus, on an average, each plot of land produces two or three crops every two years.

Manuring

The major sources of manure are plant and animal wastes, which are stored in heaps near the houses. Cow-dung is the most important manure, but it is also the main source of fuel for the housewife. According to a Meo informant, people make cow-dung cakes for fuel from November to June. In June, the surplus dried cow-dung cakes are stored in a *batevra* (storage hut) for the rainy season. From July to October it is too wet to make cow-dung cakes. In these months people seek to maximize the cow-dung deposited in the fields by pasturing (1) their own cattle, (2) rented cattle, and (3) poor quality cattle bought for the purpose.

Modernization

There has been no noticeable change in the agricultural techniques employed by the farmer in Chavandi Kalan. Even the enterprising Sikh cultivators have adopted the more backward techniques of the Meos. Some farmers have tried out chemical fertilizers in the past few years, but due to lack of proper guidance and irrigation the results have

not been encouraging. Many farmers have dug compost pits on the advice of the Gram Sewak, but no one has ever used proper techniques. Some years ago, the Community Development Department succeeded in persuading a few farmers to buy an improved iron plough, but it is in disuse because it is too heavy for the local bullocks. The cultivators are eager to get the seed from the Community Development Department, not so much for its quality as to the low rate of interest charged on the deferred payment in kind next year. No farmer has shown any desire to buy modern farm machinery, partly because the fragmentation of holdings makes such an investment uneconomical.

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

The Mewati word for cattle is *dhan*, which means "wealth". Regardless of the market value, ownership of cattle is considered a sign of affluence. Therefore, cattle-raising has become a status symbol. The farmer who owns the single largest area of land in Chavandi Kalan also owns the largest herd of cattle. This farmer is a Brahman who acquired land after 1947. To him, ownership of a large herd of cattle, regardless of their quality, is a means to assert his importance in the village. Out of the sixty head of cattle he owns, only three are useful at any given time: two bullocks which are strong enough for ploughing, and one cow that yields milk beyond the needs of her own calf. The reasons he gives for keeping so many head of cattle are: (1) he can sell a few heifers and a few bullocks every year for cash, (2) he obtains plenty of manure, and (3) it is a good religious practice in Hinduism to feed the cow. In fact, the maintenance of his cattle herd costs him much more than the return from it.

Almost every household in the village owns cattle, but only a small number of them are useful for work or for milk at any point of time. Thus, in June 1964, I counted a total of 795 head of cattle in the village (cows and buffaloes), but only 254 were reported to be useful. The number of cattle owned by the villagers is given in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Ownership of cattle in Chavandi Kalan by households

Number of cattle owned	*Number of households owning cattle*
0	13
1 to 5	55
6 to 10	30
11 to 15	14
16 to 20	6
21 to 30	1
50 or more	1
Total	120

In addition to cattle, the villagers keep other animals such as camels, goats, and horses. A few households raise poultry also, but only for personal consumption. Poultry is raised mostly by low caste Hindus, the Muslims, and a few Sikh families. Horses are owned by Banias for transporting supplies to and from the market towns. Goats and camels are raised across castes.

Cowherds

One of the most common sights of life in Chavandi Kalan is the movement of cattle. Every morning all the animals of the village are taken out to the community grazing area near the hills. In the evening, just before dusk, one sees long rows of animals slowly converging on the village. Only working bullocks and lactating buffaloes are stall-fed; all other animals depend almost entirely on grazing in the pastures. They are given additional food only when vegetation is poor and there is danger of starvation. However, in the very hot summer months, a number of animals die of hunger.

Grazing of cattle is done by full-time cowherds. There are twenty-seven of these, mostly Meos, in the village. Most of them are young men in their late teens or early

twenties. Each cowherd has one or more younger assistants, usually boys in their early teens. Herding of cattle is considered less prestigious than farming. Often the younger sons are encouraged to take up this occupation. The oldest son, who is to become the head of the household, is given charge of the land and is groomed for participation in village politics. A distinction is made between cowherds and goatherds. Unlike cowherding, goatherding is generally adopted as a lifelong profession. Still, it is considered less desirable than farming, and is taken up as a supplementary occupation by people who have insufficient land.

Most cowherds and goatherds graze their own and other's animals for a fee. The standard monthly fee for an adult buffalo is two rupees, for a cow one rupee, for a calf one-half to three-quarters of a rupee, payable in kind at the harvest time. During the monsoon season the animals are pastured in the fields at night for manuring purposes, and the herding fee is paid by the owner of the field.

Though herding is normally done by young males, females are responsible for tending the animals. They do the tedious work of digging out the weeds from the fields and bringing them home for fodder. No special fodder crops are grown, but sometimes mustard and millet are used for fodder. Women cut the fodder, carry it home on their heads, chop it, and feed it to the animals. They also milk the animals, make cow-dung cakes, and clean the stables. The Meo men resent doing these chores. In Chavandi Kalan, there are a few widowers who gave up farming because there was no woman in the household to look after the animals. The refugee Sikh men, who fed animals in the Punjab, are now influenced by the practices of the Meos. A Sikh woman complained: "Our men have become lazy since coming here. They emulate the Meos and do not work as much as they used to. We women are worst hit. We have now to do twice as much work, while our men have more leisure."

Animals are essential for agriculture in Chavandi Kalan.

Bullocks provide the draft power for agriculture and transportation. Cows are kept only for supplying male calves. Their milk yield is hardly enough for the calves. Buffaloes are the main source of milk for human consumption. Male buffaloes are allowed to starve or are killed for meat while quite young. This is a recent development. Before 1947, few Meos of Chavandi Kalan ate meat; those who did, preferred mutton, and all of them avoided beef. Cow meat is still not eaten, but a few Meos, especially the younger generation, would accept it if available. The Hindus dislike the idea of killing even buffaloes for meat. Hence the Meos have to take the buffaloes outside of the village to butcher them.

Cattle are never allowed to wander about, especially during the main crop seasons. They are taken out for grazing by cowherds who keep a close watch over them. Nevertheless, on their way to and from the grazing area the cattle do stray away into the fields and quickly munch as much crop as they can before the cowherds chase them out. Also, during the night, some animals escape and graze in the fields. Sometimes people abandon dry cows, which then become wild and roam about, often in herds. Because of the feeling among Hindus against killing the cow, these wild cattle cannot be killed. They are a serious problem in Mewat. The villagers do realize the damage caused by cattle, but they take a fatalistic view of it. A Meo farmer told me: "Well, cows do damage, but still crops are good or bad more because of the amount and distribution of rainfall than because of the harm done by the stray cattle. Success or failure of the crop is in the hands of God."

HANDICRAFTS

There is no handicraft industry in Chavandi Kalan for the outside market.The Meos think of handicrafts as an inferior occupation. However, they are not opposed to producing articles for their own use. Almost all of them twist the rope and the string they need. Mats are woven for bullock carts, and fans are made by women for the use of the

family members.

To produce things for his own use is a basic element in the general attitude of the Chavandi Kalan farmer. He has only a tenuous contact with money economy. He sells just a small portion of his crop for cash in order to buy manufactured goods such as cloth and kerosene and to repay his debts. But, for most of his needs, which are met within the village, he prefers the barter system as the means of exchange. He even pays for the things he buys from the local shopkeepers in grain, very much to his disadvantage. But the fact is that the farmer is not accustomed to handling money and is unsure of his ability to use it with any degree of control over his transactions. Hence he tries to avoid using money by manufacturing things for his own needs.

MARKETING AND OUTSIDE ECONOMIC LINKS

Every farmer in Chavandi Kalan sells part of his crop for cash. Those who have enough land grow mustard and sell the entire crop in addition to part of the cereal crop. The most important need for cash is for the repayment of debts which every farmer incurs. For this purpose, however, most farmers do not have to transport their crop to the grain market to Tijara, or Khairthal, about forty kilometres away. The creditors, mostly Banias residing in the same or nearby village, often accept repayment in grain at a price slightly below the prevailing market price. In fact, the Banias prefer to be paid in grain, since it is always to their advantage: for they can stock the grain until the market prices go up. The bigger landowners, with more to sell, find it worth their while to take their produce to the mraket.

The second most important need of the farmer for cash is for his clothing and shoes, neither of which is available in the village, and because the town shopkeepers do not accept payment in grain. Most other things that the farmer needs, such as salt, pepper, soap, sugar, tobacco, etc., can be purchased from the Bania shops in the village against payment in grain. In recent years, the villager has

developed a desire for some machine-made goods of city origin, for which he requires cash. The villager has been acquiring these goods in a large variety and number.

Another noticeable recent change is that many farmers, especially those who visit the markets to sell their farm products, tend to purchase commodities in bulk. For example, a number of farmers buy a camel-load of *gur* (brown sugar) for it is cheaper than buying from the local Bania from day to day. There are people who even buy minor items such as pepper, salt, etc., from the market towns in large quantities. An informant told me: "Now we have to go to Tijara occasionally to visit the Community Development Department or to contact some politicians. So we shop while we are there. It saves us a considerable amount of money." The village shopkeepers are feeling the effect of this change. All the three shopkeepers in Chavandi Kalan bitterly complain of a diminishing sales trend. One Bania confided to me, "Our business is very poor. Even on a brisk day our sales hardly exceed ten rupees."

There is some inter-village trading, especially involving animals. The money price of the animals is always settled, but spot payment is rarely made. Usually people trade with relatives or acquaintances. Sometimes a part of the payment is made at the time of the deal and the rest at the following harvest. In most of the transactions I had observed, the buyer always borrowed for the down payment and promised to pay the remainder later.

The Sikhs are the only agricultural caste whose members seek seasonal employment outside of the village. Each household sends a few of its members to the Punjab, where they pick cotton or harvest rice paddy. This practice has become increasingly popular in recent years for it is very lucrative. Some of the *kamins* (service castes) too—notably the Sakkas and Chamars—seek employment during the slack agricultural seasons. Occasionally, Meos may spend a few weeks with a relative in another village, but they rarely go outside of Mewat for purely economic reasons. However, some Meos feel envious of the Sikhs for the latter's ability to earn extra cash by outside employ-

ment. A Meo informant said: "The Sikhs are *dulia* [wanderers]. But we Meos do not go much outside of Mewat for employment. We like to stay close to our village."

THE JAJMANI ARRANGEMENTS

The service castes provide specialized economic, social, and ritual services to the Meos on a permanent basis. For example, if a barber served a certain number of Meo families in the village, his descendants, regardless of their competence, would inherit the right to serve the same families, and this understanding was binding on both sides. The Meo *jajman* (patron) compensated the service castes by giving them a certain amount of grain at the harvest time and, in addition, certain gifts on special occasions such as festivals and life cycle rites. This system had existed in Mewat for several centuries, and was in operation in 1947.

The basic *jajmani* arrangement still exists in Chavandi Kalan, but it has been considerably weakened and is rapidly disappearing. Land ownership is no longer the monopoly of the Meos. Despite the changes in landholding since 1947, the Meos are still the major *jajman* group. Two Brahman households, which have acquired sizable landholdings, have also become *jajman*. The Sikhs could have become *jajman*, but they preferred not to. Of the remaining households, the Banias do not participate in the *jajmani* arrangements; the rest are known collectively as the *kamin*. Members of the *kamin* castes have an elaborate exchange arrangement with their *jajmans*, which shall be described separately for each caste.

The Sakkas

There are three Sakka households in the village. They are closely related to one another, and for *jajmani* arrangements they are considered as one household. One of their members explained: "We are one family, in fact. The reason we have three separate *chulhas* is to keep the women out of trouble." The Sakkas originally came from another village. They were invited to settle in Chavandi Kalan for there was no one of this caste in the village.

The Sakkas perform two distinct services. First, they provide a rope and a bucket made from discarded rubber tube at the two main village wells. It is their responsibility to see that the ropes and the buckets are always kept in good condition. This facility is available for all the villagers. But, since the Sakkas are Muslim, the Hindu castes and the Sikhs use these buckets only for drawing water for their animals and for bathing and laundering purposes. For drawing drinking water they use their own equipment. The Chamars, who in actual fact are not allowed to use the village wells, claim that they, just as the high caste Hindus, would not use the bucket provided by the Sakkas.

For their service, the Sakkas are to receive one *dhaun* (about 20 kilograms) of foodgrain per year from every household. However, only the Meos, the two land-owning Brahman households, and a few Sikhs pay the Sakkas. The Hindus do not pay on the ground that they are using their own ropes and buckets. The head of a Sakka household told me that all the other households in the village compensated him in grain except the *kamin* castes, which instead provided him with their specialized services. But I had discovered that he was only stating the ideal: the *kamin* castes not only did not pay the Sakka in grain, but in fact they charged cash payment for their services to him.

Second, the Sakkas supply one to two *mashaks* (goatskins) of water to each of about fifteen Meo households every day. They also maintain the water supply at one of the two mosques in the village. For this service each client pays approximately 40 kilograms of grain per year and two *rotis* with some cooked vegetables every day.

The Hindus do not ordinarily drink water supplied by the Sakkas in their leather containers. At harvest time the Sakkas carry water from field to field and fill the pitchers of the farmers, who work all day. In return for this service the Sakkas are given every time a small *puli* (bundle of harvested stalks). People often give a *puli* to the Sakkas even if they do not take any water. There is no defined territory with regard to Sakkas collecting *puli*. The

Sakkas of Chavandi Kalan may serve other villages and Sakkas from other villages may come to Chavandi Kalan. Most Hindu farmers bring their own water to the fields; but if they run short they may drink from the Sakka's *mashak*. Only the Brahmans and the Banias try to avoid this. A Sikh farmer told me: "We and the Hindus drink water from the Sakka's *mashak* when we are in the fields. There it is all right. We are covered with dust all over. Also it would be a waste of time to go all the way to the village for a drink of water."

The Sakkas also supply water to the Meo households on such occasions as marriage and religious festival. For house construction all castes, including the Hindus, may use the Sakkas' services. There is an additional payment for such service. It is considered a status symbol by the Meos to take a Sakka along with the marriage party to the bride's village to act as an attendant—a function for which the Sakka is compensated.

The activities of the Sakkas of Chavandi Kalan are no longer restricted to the village. The head of a Sakka household has a brother working in Ahmedabad where he supplies water to the Muslim weavers employed in the textile mills. Another adult male works there for about six months in a year. Their earnings—about four rupees a day each—provide a welcome cash to the families back in Chavandi Kalan.

In recent years, the Sakkas have moved into farming. In 1964, they had leased about eight *bighas* of land on crop-sharing basis. They aspire to own land and thus to raise their economic and social status in the village. They have established close ties with a Meo household and, in the hope of a reward of land, have tried to do questionable favours for its members. The other Meos in the village disapprove of the intention of the Sakkas and they would have tried to prevent them from acquiring land if it was before 1947, but now they can do little about it.

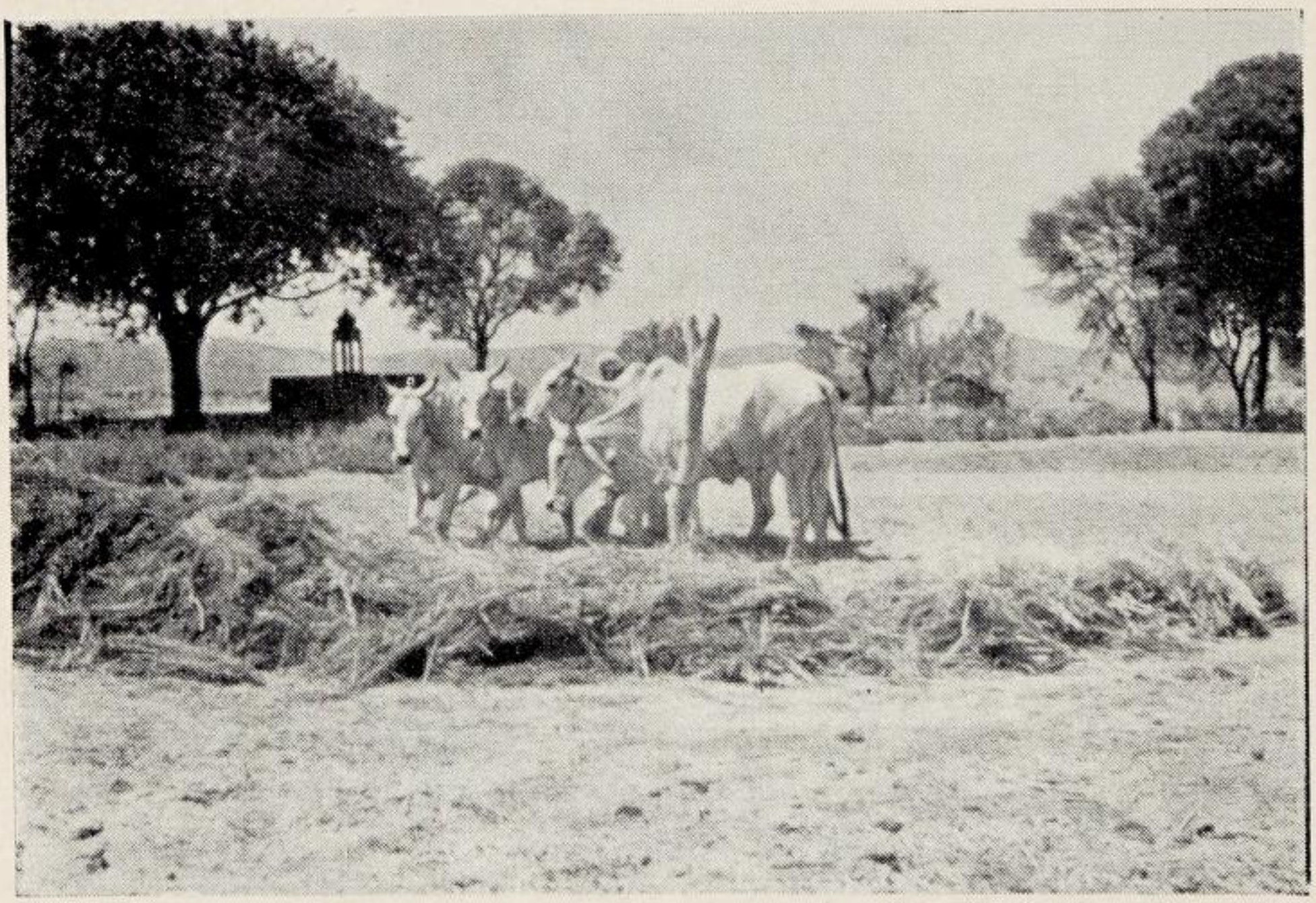
The Khatis

The village has only one Khati household to do car-

women making cow-dung cakes

winnowing

Dakot predicting the future



bullocks crushing harvested wheat

pentry work. Before 1947, there were four, but all of them left the village during the riots at the time of partition and only one returned later. The head of this household, by name Motiram, was born in Chavandi Kalan and has inherited his profession from his ancestors. Motiram has *jajmani* arrangements with about forty households, most of which are Meo, the exception being two Brahmans. All the Sikh farmers and some Meos pay in cash for Motiram's services.

Under the *jajmani* arrangements, Motiram is responsible for all the repairs to agricultural implements. For this service he gets about 40 kilograms of grain—wheat, barley, or gram—and ten *pulis* of wheat stalks annually per plough. The new implements and construction and repair of houses and bullock carts are paid for in cash.

The village blacksmith being a poor workman, Motiram does some blacksmithy also for which he is paid in cash. At the time of a boy's marriage among his Meo *jajman* he provides the *chauki* (low wooden stool) and the *bait* (cane-shaped steelwire carried by the groom) and for a girl's marriage only the *chauki*. In return he is to be paid one rupee, half a kilogram of brown sugar, one kilogram of rice, and four and a half kilograms of wheat. But in practice the amount varies from household to household. A Meo informant told me that most of the Meos would pay the Khati only Rs. 1.25 or 4.5 kilograms of wheat for the *chauki* or for the *chauki* and the *bait* together. However, the religious importance of the *chauki* and the *bait* is decreasing; so is the payment to the Khati.

In addition to his traditional occupation, Motiram has begun farming in recent years. He owns no land, but sharecrops two to three *bighas* every year.

The Kherapati Brahman

The word Kherapati literally means "master of the village", an honorific title given to the practising Brahman of the village. In Chavandi Kalan, there is only one Kherapati Brahman household. The head of the household is a young man of about 22, nicknamed "Ramu". He claims

that his ancestors came to the village when it was founded about five hundred years ago. Before 1947, the Kherapati enjoyed considerable prestige and was liberally rewarded by the Meos who patronized his services. His family was even given some tax-free land. In addition to the customary rewards for his services, the Kherapati was given cows or grain on occasions such as the construction of a new house or well, the birth of a son, or a marriage. After 1947, the Meos reduced the use of his services to such an extent that he had to buy a sewing machine and become a tailor, selling his services for cash.

Currently he serves most of the high caste Hindus as *purohit* (priest). Since 1947, he has added some Chamar households to his clientele. As *purohit* he performs marriages and officiates at all the other life cycle rites. The villagers consult him for *muhurat* (auspicious date) for fixing marriages, for laying foundation-stones of houses and wells, and for starting new projects of all kinds. Before a well is dug, all castes, including the Meos, set up an image of Behru (a deity) and perform a *puja* near the site. But the Meos do not any more consult him for the *muhurat*. Ramu told me: "Now, mullahism [orthodox Islam] is spreading among the Meos. Ten years ago Sumer [a Meo] asked my father to perform a *puja* when he built his stone-house. He gave us 20 kilograms of wheat and a cow. Six years ago Khillu [another Meo] consulted me for a *muhurat* for his new house and promised to give a cow. But he did never fulfil his promise. Recently, Shitab [also a Meo] built a house, asked for a *muhurat*, but paid nothing. Ghotu [again a Meo] paid me only one rupee for the *muhurat* of his house. The Meos also used to invite the Kherapati at Fatiha. but they do not do so any more." Once in a while Ramu is asked to cook for the Hindu guests at a Meo marriage, and sometimes to carry a formal letter to another village. But he does not now do much for the Meos.

The Sikhs do not use the Kherapati's services. There are not enough Hindu families in Chavandi Kalan to provide sufficient income for Ramu, but he stays on for his tailoring business and for his land.

In recent years, Ramu has begun to ask for *puli* from the farmers at harvest time, but he does not admit this to outsiders. The farmers have regard for him and always give him at least two *pulis*, whereas to beggars they may give only one. If a farmer insists on giving only one *puli*, Ramu asks the farmer to divide it into two. On his rounds to collect *puli*, he carries an almanac and reads aloud the predictions for the following year with regard to weather conditions and prices of agricultural products. However, few farmers take these predictions seriously, although not many openly express doubts.

The Dakots

Out of the four households of Dakots in Chavandi Kalan, the two refugees from Pakistan own land and have almost abandoned their traditional occupation of alm-gathering. The other two households still depend on their traditional occupation. Every morning the adult males go out with a large cloth bag and ask for alms from house to house; they accept only grain and uncooked food. They often go to other villages as well. At harvest time they go from field to field, read out from the almanac the predictions concerning weather and prices of agricultural products in the following year, and ask for *puli*. I accompanied a Dakot named Hari on his round one day. He approached farmers busily engaged in harvesting, opened his little almanac, and started reading it. The farmers stopped working and listtened. Sometimes they commented and asked questions, and in the end they gave him a *puli* or two. No farmer refused to give him a *puli;* most of the Meos gave two or even more. Some said, "Your *pulis* are *lagi bandhi* [agreed upon and earmarked] and you can have them anytime." Others said, "This is God's crop and you have a share in it. We are glad to give to you." Whenever someone gave him a small *puli*, he refused to take it, and in every case he was given a big one. At the end of the day, Hari had collected about thirty-six *pulis*, from which he would get about 40 kilograms of wheat and about one quintal of chaff for his cow. At each harvest Hari collects

about four to six quintals of grain from the farmers. He sells part of this for cash and keeps the rest for his consumption.

In addition to what the Dakots collect by daily alms and at harvest time, they receive gifts of money or grain from the farmers at marriages. The Meos give their Dakot *kamin* one rupee at the time of marriage in their families. On the occasion of festivals people give Dakots some money as well as grain on their usual rounds for alms. Although the Dakots provide no economic services for the farmer, they refer to the farmers as their *jajman*. The cultivators think of them as performers of a valuable service. By seeking alms, they provide people an opportunity to give to a Brahman, a highly meritorious deed. I asked a Meo farmer if he begrudged giving to the Dakots. He replied: "Not in the least. The success of agriculture depends on God. If He sends rain, the crops are good; otherwise they are ruined. If we farmers do not share what God has produced, He gets angry. If we are generous, He is pleased." In fact, if the Dakots fail to call at a house for a few mornings, they are sought out and asked to come regularly.

The Nais

The village has two Nai families. Both own land and take a good deal of interest in agriculture, and at the same time they carry on their traditional occupation of barbering in accordance with the *jajmani* system. They serve the Meos and all the Hindu castes except the "untouchables". The Chamars and the Bhangis have their own Nai in a neighbouring village.

Each of the two Nais serves almost an equal number of households in the village. They provide barbering services to all the male members of the households of their *jajman* and are paid according to the total number of members, regardless of their age. For their services, the Nais get five kilograms of foodgrains per male in a household, paid once a year after the *sadhi* harvest. In addition, they are given eight to ten *pulis* twice a year, at each harvest. Peo-

ple can go to their Nai anytime during the day for a haircut or a shave.

Apart from barbering, the Nais also act as messengers, carrying formal and informal messages to other villages on behalf of their *jajmans*. They are not, however, paid separately for this service except when the message is a happy one, such as a marriage announcement, which also brings a gift of money or food from the recipient of the message.

The Nai has an important role at the time of marriage. In a boy's marriage he accompanies the *barat* (marriage party) and serves the members of the *barat* at the bride's village. He fills the water pipe, carries luggage, provides water for drinking and bathing, and carries formal messages between the bridal parties. For this he gets gifts of about thirty to thirty-five rupees. At the girl's marriage he supervises the arrangements for the guests and also acts as a messenger. The *barat* has to wait for the Nai before going to the bride's home for meals or for any of the ceremonies. At the girl's marriage he gets about a hundred rupees.

The Nai also circumcises the males. But since this is a strictly Muslim custom, the Meos of Chavandi Kalan turn to a Muslim Nai from another village for this service.

The Lohar

Chavandi Kalan has one Lohar—a Muslim. He is a deaf-mute and a poor workman. Most people, therefore, prefer to use the services of the carpenter even for blacksmithy. However, a few Meos do honour the traditional *jajmani* arrangement and pay the Lohar at the rate of 25 kilograms of grain per plough per year, plus 15 to 16 *pulis* at each harvest. In return, they use his services for what they are worth.

The Lohar supplies a large spoon and a low wooden stool on the occasion of a marriage in a *jajman's* family. Both the spoon and the stool are needed during marriage, and the Lohar gets gifts of money: five to ten rupees at a boy's marriage and nearly twice as much at that of a girl.

His total income, including his rewards for the special services, barely support his widowed sister and her two children, who live with him. He, therefore, supplements his income by working as an agricultural labourer.

The Faqirs

There is one Faqir household in Chavandi Kalan. The Faqirs áre a Muslim caste which is somewhat similar to the Hindu Dakots in regard to their social and economic role in the *jajmani* arrangement. The main occupation of Faqirs is to gather alms, but those in Chavandi Kalan do so only on festive occasions. Since they are recent immigrants to the village, people do not take them seriously. Unlike the Dakots, the Faqirs have a traditional right to receive five kilograms of grain per year from every Muslim household in the village; but very few Meos give this. However, in addition to asking for alms on festive occasions, the Faqirs ask for *puli* at every harvest, and every farmer gives one *puli* or more.

The Faqirs also have an important role at deaths in preparing the body for burial according to the Muslim rites. Also they are the traditional messengers for bad news such as deaths. But the Faqir in Chavandi Kalan does none of these things. Brought to the village recently by attractive promises, he feels neglected and is planning to leave the village.

The Bhangis

There are two households of sweepers in Chavandi Kalan. Both are long-time residents of the village and have well-established *jajmani* arrangements with most of the local land-owning households, with the exception of the Punjabi refugees. The village is equally divided physically between the two Bhangi households, although in each section not all the households patronize the Bhangi assigned to them. When my family and I settled down in the village, there was a dispute between the Bhangi households. Both wanted to serve us. One based its claim on the fact that the house we occupied belonged to its *jajman;* the other

claimed that the area fell within its territory. The latter claim was finally accepted by the villagers on the ground that it was not fair to get the work on the basis of ownership of property for that would mean that if a *jajman* of one Bhangi purchased all the houses in the village, the other Bhangi would have to leave the village.

The Bhangi has to clean once a day the cattle shed, the front yard, and the street in front of the house of the *jajman*. Also, he has to dispose of refuse. For this service he gets 10 kilograms of wheat per year per plough, three to five *pulis* at each harvest, one *roti* and some cooked vegetables every day.

At the time of marriage and on other social occasions, when there is a feast, the Bhangi is responsible for removing the leaf plates and for sweeping the floor after the feast is over. The left-over food is part of his reward. He also receives a gift of money, the amount varying with the status of the family and the nature of the occasion. At special rites, such as marriages, the Bhangi serves even those families which are normally not his *jajman*.

The Bhangi has to dispose of dead animals also. He takes them out of the village, skins them if they are cows or buffaloes, and leaves the carcasses to the vultures. In recent years, the village panchayat has started auctioning the right to remove the hides of the dead cattle on a yearly basis. The Bhangis of Chavandi Kalan lost the bid in 1964 to a Chamar of another village, but an agreement was reached between the two whereby all the skins were to be sold by the local Bhangis to the Chamar at a fixed price.

The Chamars

There are eleven Chamar households in Chavandi Kalan. Before 1947, the Chamars had *jajmani* arrangement with the Meos under which they supplied shoes and other leather goods to the farmers in exchange for an annual payment in grain. They also served at marriages and other occasions and were presented with gifts of money and cooked or raw food. But, since 1947, the Chamars have abandoned their traditional work; nor do they accept

gifts of any kind; they particularly refuse food from the Meos, intent as they are on moving upward in the caste hierarchy.

A Meo informant, while explaining the procedure of payment to the *kamins*, told me: "After harvesting the crop, we cart it to the threshing-ground. There it is threshed and winnowed. During this time the *kamins* come to claim their share. We give them their share by weight. Before we take the grain home, all the *kamins* must be paid off." Another Meo said: "By the time we take the grain home about 210 kilograms, if not more, is already gone." The actual amount to be distributed among the *kamins* varies according to the size of the farm and the number of ploughs, but in every case at least 10 to 20 per cent of the crop goes of the *kamins*.

Although most people know the rule for the exchange between the *jajman* on the one hand and the various *kamins* on the other, the behaviour does not always accord with the rule. The prevailing tendency is to condone the inability of others to fulfil their *jajmani* obligations. There is the underlying desire to perpetuate the status quo. The *jajmans* gave a variety of excuses for their failure to pay the traditional due to the *kamins*: "The crop was not good", "Come later on", or "Take this now, and I shall give you more at the next harvest." On the other hand, the *jajmans* are generous on certain occasions, especially at marriages.

The *kamins* are similarly unwilling to give their best in service. For one thing, many have their own land to work on. Also, because the rewards are fixed, they do not care to improve the quality of their work. Once I was watching a Meo farmer having his two-pronged rake repaired at the carpenter's. A Sikh farmer remarked that in the Punjab they used a more efficient three-pronged rake and that the local carpenter apparently did not know how to make one. The carpenter retorted that he could make a three-pronged rake, but it would be a waste of effort since he was not going to be paid for the extra work.

HOUSING

The village has both *pakka* and *kachcha* houses. The *pakka* house is built of stone laid in lime-and-gravel mortar, with a flat, stone slab roof and is supported by steel girders or wooden beams. The *kachcha* house is built with unburnt mud-bricks. To strengthen the house, small pieces of stone mixed with mud are used in the foundation and the lower part of the walls. Its roof is thatched and covered with *pula* straw tied between two rows of the split bamboo. Wooden beams and trusses support the thatch. The *pakka* houses are usually larger than the *kachcha* ones.

The Meo houses, whether *kachcha* or *pakka*, have two separate portions: the *ghar*, the women's quarters; and the *bangla*, the men's quarters. The *ghar* may have one or more rooms depending upon the size of the household. Usually each married couple has at least one separate room. Each of these rooms has a door that can be locked, and has no windows. Married women sleep in their rooms with all the female children and the very young male children. Cooking is done inside of the room during most of the year and outside in summer. On one side of the room grain is stored in mud-bins: approximately one metre square and one and a half to two metres high, slightly raised above the ground. Several bins are placed side by side. Grain is poured into them from the top and taken out from a small opening at the bottom. In front of the *ghar* there is a large courtyard for the animals.

The *bangla* has one large room, always set apart from the *ghar*. Except in some of the substantial ones, the *bangla* has no door. However, a few windows are provided, but without shutters. In the room there are a few *dahlas* (large string cots) on which men sit during the day and sleep at night. All male guests or casual visitors come to the *bangla*. Only special guests are taken to the *ghar* for meals. All males of the household, including boys over six or seven years of age, sleep in *bangla* at night. Married men may visit their wives in the *ghar* during the night, but they return to the *bangla* before dawn. On one side of the *bangla* a chaff-cutter is often kept, which is used

by the women during the day to chop fodder for the animals. An essential item in the *bangla* is a large *hukka* (water pipe), smoked by the men of the house and offered to guests in hospitality. Also, in the *bangla*, a fire made of cow-dung cakes is kept smoldering for lighting the *hukka*. The water pipe and fire in the *bangla* signify adult males in the family and their hospitality.

This separation of the *ghar* and the *bangla* is characteristic of Meo houses throughout Mewat. All other Muslim castes and the local Hindu castes tend to have smaller dwellings; many aspire to have, but few realize, houses on the Meo scale. The Banias are the only other caste that tends to have substantially-built houses. Their houses are called *haveli*. They differ in design from the others and also have no *bangla*. The Sikhs and the other refugee castes live in dwellings abandoned by the Meos; but in altering the internal arrangement, they have done away with 'the *bangla*.

CLOTHING

Before 1947 the dress of Meo men and women was of the traditional Rajasthani style. The material used was often handwoven heavy cotton cloth. The men wore a turban, called *phainta* or *saphi*. The material for the turban was a piece of cotton cloth seventy to ninety centimetres wide and five to ten metres long. The popular shirt was the typical Rajasthani *kamri* or its two variants, *sadri* and *kot*. The garment that covered the body below the waist was the *dhoti*. The most common type of shoes was the village-made *panha*, which has a design common throughout rural north India.

The women's dress consisted of three main garments: *ghagra*, a full skirt reaching nearly to the ankles; *kurti*, a tight waistcoat-like garment with buttons in front; and *lhasi*, a long piece of cloth to cover the head and shoulders. All these garments were locally made and had a great deal of embroidery on them. This work was a specialty of Chamar women. The colours used for the dress were bright pastels, with a predominance of red and yellow,

characteristic of Rajasthani women's dress.

Since Independence, however, the Meos' dress has changed considerably, though the older people still wear the traditional dress. Men's dress now consists of a *kurta* (long, collarless shirt), *tehmat* (a piece of cloth worn around the waist, shorter and wider than a dhoti), and turban. The colour preference also has changed; traditionally, the men wore mostly white garments, but now a variety of colours is seen. The cloth used now is mill-made, and the manner of stitching is quite different.

The women's dress has changed even more drastically than that of men. The skirt has given way to a kind of trousers called *khusni*, tight below the knees and relatively loose in the upper part. The traditional *kurti* yielded to a long *kamiz*. For the head garment, *lhasi*, there is now a lighter covering, called *lugra*. A very important change has been the complete abandonment of local embroidery work. In a short period of fifteen years the art of embroidery has been nearly lost. A few older women who know the art are still alive, but they lack the strength and the keen eyesight required for such fine handwork. None of the younger women has learned the skill.

Women now prefer mill-made material with printed designs of dark colours. This change in women's dress was apparently initiated in the two years following 1947 when they were in Gurgaon. There the women had already abandoned the traditional Mewati dress, and they made fun of the Rajasthani women. The Muslim religious leaders, the *mullahs*, also objected strongly to the traditional dress. They complained that the skirt and *kurti* were too immodest for Muslim women. Consequently, when the Meos of Chavandi Kalan lived in Gurgaon, they slowly changed their dress to conform to the garments of their hosts.

INDEBTEDNESS AND SAVING

Malcolm Darling wrote: "In Gurgaon, as we have seen, the Ahirs are much less indebted than the thriftless Meos, though they are 'exceptionally heavily assessed' and the

Meos are just the contrary."[2] This seems to be true of the Meos of Chavandi Kalan today. Table 7 shows the extent of indebtedness in Chavandi Kalan.

TABLE 7

Indebtedness of villagers of Chavandi Kalan (as of September 1964)

Extent of indebtedness	*No. of Meo house-holds*	*No. of non-Meo households*	*Total No. of house-holds*
Rs. 100 or less	5	7	12
101 — 200	1	2	3
201 — 300	2	3	5
301 — 400	0	0	0
401 — 500	6	1	7
501 — 600	2	1	3
601 — 800	7	3	10
801 —1000	3	2	5
1,001 —2000	14	12	26
2,001 or more	15	10	25
No debt	11	13	24
Total	66	54	120

Out of 66 Meo households in Chavandi Kalan, 55 were in debt in September 1964; of these, over 50 per cent had debts exceeding Rs. 1,000. In fact, indebtedness is high for the whole village and only slightly higher for the Meos compared to the non-Meos. The Meos borrow from a local Bania, a Sunar money-lender, and a few Banias of the neighbouring villages. However, in the past four or five years the cooperative credit society, organized in the village under the guidance of the Community Development Department, has become the most active credit agency: out

2. Malcolm Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1925. p. 221.

of 55 Meo households in debt, 35 have borrowed at least part of the amount from the cooperative. The cooperative charges only 7.5 per cent interest per annum, as against 20 to 40 per cent (depending on the type of security offered) charged by the Bania. The importance of *takavi* (government loan for agricultural development) has considerably declined. A farmer explained: "There is hardly any saving on interest on government *takavi*. Right from the time of application, bribes are expected at every point by the *patvari*, the Gram Sevak, the clerks in the government office, the cashier, and so on. Finally, when the *takavi* is granted, the clerks in the Community Development Department ask for a celebration where liquor and expensive foods are expected to be served. By the time the farmer gets home, the amount of the loan is considerably trimmed down." Even when *takavi* is in the form of agricultural equipment, the farmer does not benefit very much. About three years ago some farmers in Chavandi Kalan received *takavi* in the form of engine-driven pumping sets for irrigation, each costing about Rs. 2,800. But the machinery proved to be of such a poor quality that after three months it had to be sent for repairs, and the farmers refused to accept it back.

Some Meos also lend money on terms similar to those offered by the Banias, but most of the Meos prefer usufruct from the borrower's land to cash interest. A loan of Rs. 200-300 per *bigha* entitles the lender to cultivate the land and appropriate the entire crop until the loan is repaid. With increasing Islamization, the Meo money-lenders are giving up the practice of charging interest and are preferring the use of the borrower's land, for Islam prohibits usury.

In general, the Meos incur debts for marriages and litigation. To illustrate this, we may consider a few individual cases. "A" has a debt of about Rs. 6,300—Rs. 5,500 from two Banias and Rs. 800 from the cooperative society. The major part of this debt was incurred in 1963 at the time of the marriages of two of his nieces. His family is one of the few Meo households which still con-

tinue the all but extinct tradition of giving dowry to the groom's family at the marriage of a daughter. "A" was responsible for making arrangements for the marriages of two of his nieces, and he gave larger dowries than some of his cousins had given in the past. The debts were incurred in the hope that the girls' father, who lives in Pakistan, would reimburse him for these expenses. But the latter failed to carry out his responsibility, and "A" is unable to repay the loans.

"B" Contracted debts amounting to Rs. 4,275—about Rs. 4,000 from three Banias and Rs. 275 from the cooperative. A few years ago he borrowed Rs. 3,000 to use as a bride-price for one of his sons. He owns very little land, and the crops have not been good since he had incurred the debt. As a result, the interest has kept accumulating. After each harvest he had repaid a part of the debt and the interest, but he had had to borrow more soon afterwards.

"C" is another substantial debtor of the village. His debt is of the order of Rs. 4,300 of which he owes Rs. 3,000 to the Banias and the rest to the government and the cooperative. One of the largest landowners of Chavandi Kalan, he does not cultivate the land himself, and so his income has been modest. His heaviest debt was incurred early in 1964 for his son's marriage.

"D" has a debt of Rs. 3,500. He borrowed about Rs. 2,000 from the Banias and the rest from the cooperative and the government. He is politically active in the village, and this partly explains his large loan from the government agencies. He has been involved in a court case against the leader of a rival political faction in the village for over three years. During this time he has not only had to pay lawyers but also to bribe court officials. Several members of his faction, who are his relatives, have been sharing the litigation expenses and are thereby getting into debt.

Among the eleven debt-free Meo households there are fewer men for whose marriages they had to pay bride-price and many women for whom they received bride-price. They are relatively inactive in village politics and have had no litigation, and they are frugal farmers, mana-

ging their land with care.

Savings

The farmers with small holdings never have much surplus except perhaps when the crop is exceptionally good and the market for agricultural products favourable. The big land-owners, on the other hand, can crop themselves only part of their land and have to lease the rest to share-croppers. Their saving potential is none too good, either.

The villager knows no trustworthy way to accumulate easily convertible savings. Given a good crop, the surplus flows into a marriage, a religious feast, or litigation. An exceptionally frugal farmer may invest in a *pakka* house or buy a few good animals. The only way one can hoard liquid savings is in silver or gold ornaments, but they are subject to loss by theft. Most people who have ornaments bury them in an earthen pitcher inside of the house. In recent years, some farmers have tried to preserve currency notes in the same manner, but with disastrous results. The farmer conceives of the modern idea of capital investment in a productive venture in a very limited sense, namely, in buying land. This sometimes happens, but there is little land in the market.

Chapter 8

SOCIAL LIFE: FAMILY AND KINSHIP

THE HOUSEHOLD

THE basic social unit among the Meos in Chavandi Kalan is the *ghar*, best translated into English as "household". It consists of relatives who live in one house, cook on a common *chulha,* and own property jointly. Most households contain several members, but a household with only one member is also acknowledged by the villagers. In Chavandi Kalan, there are sixty-six Meo households, of which only one consists of a single member. The largest Meo household has eleven members. Of the remaining sixty-four, thirteen have two to three members, twenty-eight have four to six, and twenty-three have seven to ten each.

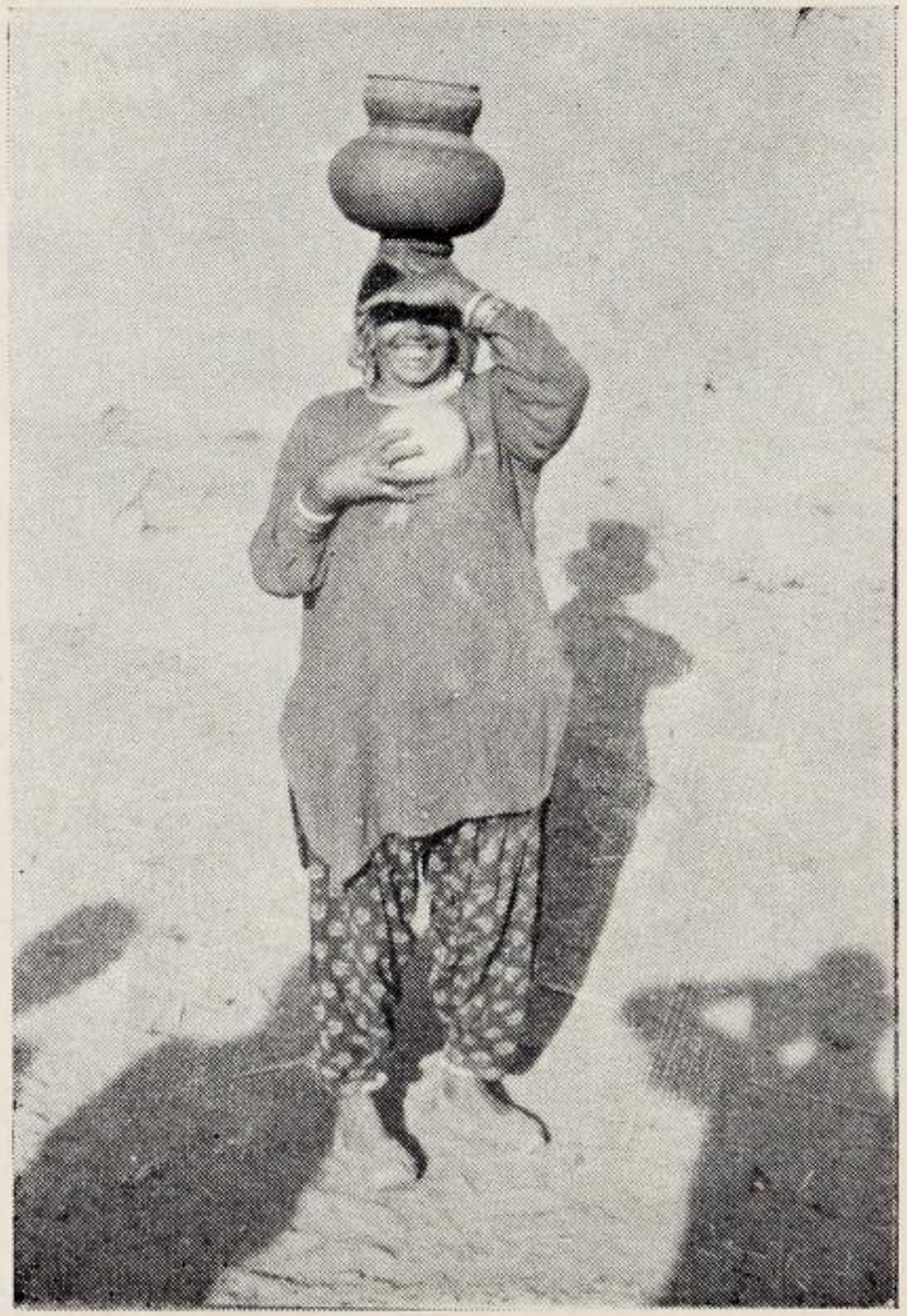
Patrilocality is the preferred rule of residence after marriage among the Meos. If there is no son to inherit the property, a daughter's son may be adopted; but normally this requires the consent of the adopter's brothers and patrilateral cousins, which may be difficult to obtain. In Chavandi Kalan, there is only one current case of matrilocal residence. An old man, who had no male descendants and all of whose close relatives had migrated to Pakistan, invited his daughter's family and her parents-in-law to settle down in his village. In order to make his invitation attractive and effective, he adopted his daughter's son so that his land and property could be legally inherited by the adopted son.

When a person without male descendants adopts his daughter's or sister's son and brings the entire family to set up matrilocal residence, the family retains its *gotra.* In other words, the adopted son belongs to his father's *gotra* and not to that of his foster parents. The meos of Chavandi Kalan belong to the Landavat Pal, but there are four households of non-native Pals. All of these had

the old

and the new

the old



and the new

in the past established matrilocal residence.

The joint (or extended) family is the ideal type among all castes, including the Meos, in Chavandi Kalan. In actual fact, however, the nuclear family is the most common. Thirty-six of the Meo households consist of nuclear families, i.e., man, wife, and their unmarried children. Of the remaining thirty, one family consists of a man and his daughter's family, nine are lineal joint families, and ten are collateral joint families. The lineal joint families consist of the father, his married sons, and their families. In such families, the father constitutes the authority figure and is the uniting factor. In fact, it is rare for the sons to separate from the joint family and to set up their own households while their father is alive. The mother is never able to exercise such a uniting influence over the sons. A collateral joint family, on the other hand, is one in which several brothers, at least one of whom is married, live together. The ten households of this kind in Chavandi Kalan are considered unstable and are expected to break up sooner or later.

Descent among the Meos is traced through the male line, and as with all strongly patrilineal systems the place of in-marrying women is at best tenuous. The term of reference—and often even the term of address—for them is that of their native village and their parents' *gotra* or Pal: "the one belonging to such-and-such a *gotra* or village". A woman's affiliation with her husband's family is strengthened if and when she bears a son. Then she becomes "the mother of so-and-so". Unless a widow marries one of her deceased husband's brothers or has had sons, she must in most cases return to her parents' home. Throughout her life a married Meo woman frequently visits her natal family, renewing her ties with her brothers and nephews. Whenever she visits her parents or brothers, she invariably utters traditional complaints in a patterned, singsong style and weeps on her mother's shoulder, reminding the parents that they are neglecting their daughter by not inviting her frequently enough—regardless of the actual frequency—and that she

will commit suicide if they do not pay her more attention.

Children are highly valued. Although more outward happiness is expressed at the birth of a son, female children are also cared for tenderly; in fact, valued more highly for their labour contribution. Even when quite young, they help their mothers with the household work, and look after the younger siblings while the mothers go out to work in the fields. As they grow older, their part in the house and farm work increases. Finally, when they marry, their parents often receive a substantial bride-price.

Most Meo couples wish for a large number of children. A young man of Chavandi Kalan asked me why my wife and I had only one child. He was curious to know whether we used any contraceptives. I explained various methods and asked if he was considering using them. He replied: "No, I do not need to use any such methods. I have only one child, and I would like to have eight or ten. Children are good to have. Boys help with the grazing of animals, and girls do household chores. It is not expensive to raise children in the village. All they need is food and clothing."

Once I happened to discuss the population explosion with some villagers. I had mentioned that the population in India was increasing by about ten million per year and that the government was trying to popularize contraceptives to reduce the birth rate. I realized that there was very little appreciation of what I was saying. One villager commented that the government was overly concerned about preventing people from having children and was not giving enough attention to the needs of families that did not have any and wanted some badly. He contended that the government should introduce some method whereby these unfortunate people could have children.

There is a fairly clear division of labour among the members of a household. The women are responsible for all the housework, including cooking, bringing water from the village well, cleaning the house, and other domestic chores. Children are entirely their responsibility, with

help from older female children. Women also take complete care of the domestic animals, except that adolescent boys graze them. Men may help with the chopping of fodder that the women bring from the fields.

Agricultural work, especially ploughing and operating the *chalas*, is the men's domain. However, women help with the planting, weeding, harvesting, and other laborious operations. Men have the sole charge of transportation work involving the use of bullock cart and camel. They cart manure to the fields, harvested crops to the threshing-ground, and grain to the market town.

Unlike the Muslim and Hindu high castes, the Meo women do not observe *parda* (seclusion), for, the Meos say, they have to work in the fields. In recent years, some highly Islamized non-Meo families living in Mewat have adopted *parda* and have tried unsuccessfully to influence the Meos. The Meo woman, however, does avoid certain relatives in her family, especially the male affine older than her husband. In the presence of these relatives, she would cover her face and avoid any kind of contact with them.

MARRIAGE AND EXOGAMY

Meos consider marriage essential for both males and females. All Meo females above fifteen in Chavandi Kalan have been married at least once. There are a few adult males, however, who are bachelors, but most of them are fairly young and hope to get married in course of time. Men are likely to marry late if they lack the money for bride-price or have some serious physical defects. There is only one Meo male in Chavandi Kalan who is above thirty and still unmarried, and unlikely to marry; he became orphaned in 1947 and could not get any help from the villagers in arranging for a bride.

Most marriages are celebrated fairly early in life. Out of the 200 married Meos in Chavandi Kalan, 108 were married before they were fifteen years old, and 181 before the age of twenty. Boys marry between 12 and 18 years of age, and since wives should be younger than their

husbands, most girls marry between the ages of 8 and 15. A Meo mother of an eight-year-old girl said: "I might marry my daughter next year or wait for five more years. It all depends on the crop. If the crop is good, we will marry her soon. For us farmers the crop is most important."

The majority of marriages among the Meos are monogamous, but polygyny is permissible. There is only one polygynous family in Chavandi Kalan. When I interviewed the head of this family, he did not mention the fact that he had two wives. But later he admitted that he had married his brother's widow as his second wife. This hesitation to admit of having two wives indicates that polygyny is not a preferred kind of marriage, or, perhaps, that the informant thought the interviewer would disapprove of it. If the first wife is barren, a man may marry again; and sometimes, though very rarely, rich Meos have two or more wives for reasons of prestige. Occasionally, a Meo may marry his brother's widow as his second wife if it is considered advantageous for the family. In any case, since the prestige attached to polygyny is not very great and since bride-price is high, such marriages are rare in Mewat.

Both widow and widower remarriage among the Meos is approved. In fact, all widows, unless they have many children, continue to remarry until they are too old. Widowers also remarry provided, of course, they can afford the bride-price.

Because of the high economic value of women, Meo men rarely divorce their wives. According to a local custom, women cannot divorce their husbands. Sometimes, however, a married woman may elope with a man. If a woman wishes to abandon her husband for another man, the first husband must be paid *jhagra* (compensation) by the latter. Unless *jhagra* is amicably settled, elopement can lead to serious feuds, which may persist for generations.

Both levirate and sororate are practised by the Meos. There are nine cases of levirate in Chavandi Kalan, of

which eight were marriages between men and their elder brothers' widows and one between a man and his younger brother's widow. One of the levirate arrangements involved a man marrying his elder brother's widow as a second wife. Marrying a younger brother's widow is not considered proper, but is permitted in special circumstances. Given the important economic role of the Meo women, a widow is encouraged to marry a brother of her late husband; and unless she is very young and without children, she is likely to agree. A Meo woman of Chavandi Kalan who has married her first husband's younger brother said: "When my first husband died, I decided to marry his younger brother. I had two sons and I was quite attached to my husband's family. So it is better to stay with them. Who knows what kind of family I would have gone into if I were to marry someone in another village?"

Since marriage is a matter concerning the entire family and not just the individuals to be wed, the decision for the levirate arrangement is made by the older men of the household, but they can only make the offer, and the woman has the option. If she is reluctant and the family wants her to stay, pressure may be brought to bear on her through relatives, but the final decision rests with her. If she is not offered levirate for lack of suitable males or because the family does not want her, she has to return to her natal family. If she has adult sons, however, she may choose to continue to live with their families, regardless of whether or not they have established separate households.

The sororate is much less common than the levirate owing to the complexities concerning bride-price. A girl's parents have to treat their son-in-law and his family with much deference and caution; therefore, when a girl dies her parents cannot easily bargain with her son-in-law's family for a second bride-price. Consequently, even if they have another daughter, they try to avoid the sororate arrangement. A young widower's mother told me: "We had paid 2,500 rupees for my son's bride. Unfortunately

she died one year after marriage. Her father had promised to find a second bride for my son from among his nieces, since he is very fond of him. He is much better off now and says that this time he will not demand any bride-price. But it has been several years since he made the promise, and we are still waiting." Such promises are sometimes fulfilled in Mewat in spite of the sacrifice involved.

Village Exogamy

The Meos in Chavandi Kalan practise strict village exogamy. No villager could recall any violation of this rule. There are a few daughters of the village now living in Chavandi Kalan, but all of them were married to outsiders. Some of them returned to their natal families late in age after they were widowed. Even in the case of matrilocality village exogamy was not violated.

The Meos of Chavandi Kalan believe to have a common ancestry, so that marriage among themselves would be incestuous. Actually, the majority of the Meos in the village belong to one exogamous Pal (Landavat). But four households belong to the Demrot Pal, descendants of a man who married a Landavat woman and was persuaded to establish matrilocal residence. Since they now live in Chavandi Kalan, they cannot marry the Landavats of the village, though they may outside of it.

In addition to the feeling that all members of each caste in Chavandi Kalan are closely related, one refers to all fellow villagers by fictive kin terms. For example, all the daughters of the village, regardless of caste, are addressed by the village men as "sister" or "daughter", depending on their relative ages. The entire community is visualized as an extended family, and members of each generation born in the village are believed to be like siblings unless, of course, they are actually related in a different way.

The Meos believe that in the past people avoided marrying in any of the villages in their *thama* or even Pal, but this restriction is now limited to one's own village. How-

ever, several men of a village may bring brides from another particular village, or several women of a village may marry into a village other than their own. In fact, both are common practices. The exchange of brides between two villages, though rare, is permissible if the other rules of exogamy are observed. The only restriction is that a father and his son are not to marry women of the same village. In other words, a man may not marry a woman from his mother's or stepmother's village. The Meos put it like this: "Father and son cannot go to the same village as bridegrooms." But a man and his grandson may.

Avoidance of Cousin Marriage

The Meos avoid both cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages. The same kin terms are used for siblings and cousins. There is no definite rule with regard to the degree of removal of the cousin whom one must avoid marrying. Any person with whom cousin relationship can be traced cannot be married. In recent years, some individuals attempted to break this rule. I was told of a Meo in Gurgaon district who arranged the marriage of his son to his brother's daughter, in line with Islamic precepts. The Meos in that village became so infuriated at this attempted "incest" that it led his village caste-mates to beat him up and turn him out of the village.

Gotra Exogamy

As noted earlier, the entire Meo caste is divided into thirteen exogamous Pals and sixty-seven or more *gotras*. In the old days, the practice was to avoid marrying into one's own, one's mother's, one's mother's mother's, and one's daughter's or sister's husband's *gotra;* but now one has only to avoid marrying in one's own *gotra.*

In practice, the Meos prefer obtaining brides from particular *gotras* and Pals and similarly to "give" daughters to particular others. Chavandi Kalan has three Pals (Landavat, Demrot, and Dehngal) and one *gotra* (Bilavat); but the Dehngal and the Bilawat are recent im-

migrants and have not contracted any marriages for their members. The Landavats and the Demrots have intermarrying relations with ten Pals and six *gotras*. (See Table 8.)

TABLE 8

Number of marriages contracted by the Landavats and the Demrots of Chavandi Kalan with other pals and gotras

Pals and gotras	*Brides obtained by Landavats*	*Daughters given in marriage by Landavats*	*Brides obtained by Demrots*	*Daughters given in marriage by Demrots*
Pals				
Balot	0	2	0	0
Chhiraklot	4	8	0	1
Dairval	1	3	0	0
Demrot	3	0	0	0
Dehngal	10	35	3	0
Duhlot	2	3	0	0
Nai	17	10	2	0
Pahat	0	5	0	0
Pundlot	2	1	0	0
Singhal	39	0	0	0
Gotra				
Besar	0	1	0	0
Bilavat	2	1	0	0
Gorval	1	3	0	0
Kamalia	4	1	0	0
Saugan	2	0	0	0
Siroiya	2	0	0	0

The Landavats of Chavandi Kalan exchange brides with six Pals and three *gotras*, and they have no reciprocal relationship with the other Pals and *gotras*. In the case of the latter, they only give daughters to two Pals and one *gotra* and only obtain brides from two Pals and two *gotras*. The Demrots have marriage relations with three

Pals; from two of them they receive brides and to one of them they give daughters. However, the above frequencies of marriage alliance do not indicate the existence of any fixed rule. It is also quite possible for the Meos of Chavandi Kalan to marry with the Meos of Pals and *gotras* other than the sixteen listed in Table 8.

Although it is not clear why the Meos of Chavandi Kalan prefer to arrange marriage alliance with particular Pals and *gotras*, there are three likely reasons for it. First of all, some Meos indicated preference for marriages with members of other Pals rather than those of other *gotras*, giving no clear justification. A second factor is the tendency to give the daughters to Pals located in the northeast and to receive brides from those situated in the southwest, again, for unknown reasons. Lastly, convenience and economy seem to be important considerations in arranging marriages. Since most travelling is done on foot or by bullock cart and camel over country paths, it is understandable that marriages are seldom contracted with families living at a great distance from Chavandi Kalan.

BRIDE-PRICE AND DOWRY

Late one evening during my fieldwork, women in a Meo house burst into loud singing indicating the birth of a son. In another part of the village a Meo woman remarked, "Too many boys are being born this year. It means there will be a famine." A Bania woman retorted: "This is very true. Too many boys does mean famine for the Meos. After all, they will have to pay a high bride-price for their marriages." The first woman did not like this allusion to bride-price and said, "Well, not all Meos pay bride-price. Some give dowry. There are all kinds of people." The Bania woman answered : "That may be so, but I have yet to see a Meo family of Chavandi Kalan that gave dowry to a daughter's husband's family."

This conversation points to a very important change in the Meo custom which generates much ambivalence and anxiety. Formerly, the Meo practice was for the bride's family to give dowry to the groom's family at marriage,

and some families in Chavandi Kalan still give huge dowries; one such family—trying to outdo a kinsman—borrowed heavily for this purpose in 1963.

Likewise, a girl's parents and all her consanguineal relatives would neither accept gifts from her affinal family nor eat food at her husband's home. The father of two young men who were married to two sisters from Chavandi Kalan told me: "My sons' father-in-law came to our village a few months before their marriage. He met me and my sons. In the evening when we offered him hospitality he refused to eat any food. Instead, he gave one rupee each to the boys. That was an indication that he had decided to engage his daughters to my sons." Several old men and women in Chavandi Kalan would hesitate to eat at their daughters' husbands' homes.

Most Meos consider it a sin to accept bride-price or any kind of gift from the daughter's husband's family. A man of Chavandi Kalan was suffering from a chronic sore on his knee; and several Meos ascribed this to his accepting bride-price for his daughters. One Meo said: "He is suffering because of his own *pap* [sins]. He has been taking large amounts of money as bride-price for his daughters. This is bad. One can never 'digest' the money gained from the sale of daughters." In a more conservative part of Mewat, Lachhmangarh, an old Meo boasted: "We don't sell our daughters in this area like the Meos of Landavat Pal. We give dowry to our daughters, which is the proper thing to do."

The custom of not accepting food and other hospitality from the daughter's affinal relatives has become almost extinct. Except for some very old people, the Meos now readily accept hospitality at their daughter's husband's home. The Meos have the custom to send for the newly married daughter after she has spent two or three days in her husband's village. In the past a *kamin*, such as a Nai, would go with a younger brother or cousin of the bride to bring her back for a visit; but now the bride's father, her uncles, brothers, and several other relatives —sometimes ten or more people—may go to the groom's

village and stay there for three days before returning with her. They accept hospitality without any hesitation.

The feeling against bride-price is still strong, but the custom has become quite prevalent. In most Meo marriages in Chavandi Kalan in the past ten years bride-price was paid. An unmarried young Meo complained to me : "These days things are going from bad to worse. People are demanding three to four thousand rupees for child brides four to five years old." Another Meo said: "With the custom of bride-price becoming more common, the incidence of cheating has increased. People take bride-price for a child bride and before Gauna marry her again to some other person and charge bride-price from him also."

The bride-price is settled between the families of the prospective bride and groom. Part of the amount is paid at the time of the engagement, and the rest at marriage and Gauna. If the girl is very young, the major portion of the bride-price is paid at the time of Gauna. The amount varies from three hundred to five thousand rupees. As a rule, it tends to be lower for younger brides. A good part of it is in the form of cash, but farm animals and silver ornaments are also given. Sometimes, by applying the bride-price, the girl's father may repay a debt, or a debt may be partially repaid through an adjustment in the bride-price.

In north India, the prevailing high-caste practice is to give dowry to the daughter's husband's family at marriage. Some feeling against this custom has been expressed by educated Hindus, but the practice has increased rather than decreased in recent years, spreading even to lower castes anxious to move up the social ladder. But the Meo trend is in the opposite direction—dowry is giving way to bride-price, a practice associated with the low castes in Hindu society.

How is one to explain this? The first and the most important reason is the increasing economic value of women. Meo women do so much work in the fields that for successful farming they are indispensable. This underlies the tendency towards bride-price. Second, among the

Meos males outnumber females: in Chavandi Kalan and in the whole of Mewat, there are approximately 868 and 891 females respectively for every 1,000 males. This scarcity of women probably contributes to the high value of women. Third, the adoption of bride-price by the Meos is facilitated by the fact that they are becoming more Islamized and are relatively less concerned about the prevailing values among the Hindus. Although the Meos resent the lowering of their status in Hindu eyes, they realize that their customs make little difference in their social position.

MEO KIN TERMS—THEIR EXTENSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The Meos have a repertoire of more than sixty terms of reference in their kinship system, each of which refers to one or more types of relative. In addition, there are a few terms of address which do not coincide with these. Among the criteria used in these terms, sex is the most important; no term denotes two relatives of opposite sex. Generation is second in importance: relatives of different generations are rarely subsumed by the same term. Other considerations—age difference, consanguinity and affinity, lineality, laterality, sex of the speaker, etc.—are used to distinguish between some relatives but not others.

Table 9 lists all the kin terms of the Meos. For convenience in discussion, the terms are divided into four groups. Group A includes the terms for relatives in Ego's generation, and Group B those for Ego's parent's generation. The terms for relatives in the second and third ascending generations are grouped under C. The fourth group, D, is for terms referring to relatives in the generations descending from Ego's. Two kinship charts (Charts I and II) clarify these various relationships from the point of view of male and female Ego.

Group A

There are twenty-three terms of reference in this group. The criteria of consanguinity and affinity are taken into account in all of them, and relatives of each kind are

TABLE 9

*Meo Kinship Terms**

No.	*Term of reference*	*Genealogical relationship*	*Term of address*	*Remarks*
GROUP A				
1	bhāī, aff. m.s. bhaiṛ	Br, FaBrSo, FaSiSo, MoBrSo, MoSiSo, MaSo, FaSo	b.n., lālā	Bhaiṛ used very rarely
2	bhābī	EBrWi	bhābī	Joking permitted
3	bahū	YBrWi, SoWi	b.n , bahū	Strict avoidance
4	bahin, aff. w.s. bhāeli	Si, FaBrDa, FaSiDa, MoBrDa, MoSiDa, MoDa, FaDa	b.n.,lālī	
5	behnoī	SiHu, cousin's Hu	b.n., jījā	Jījā for formal address
6	samdhī	SoWiFa, DaHuFa	b.n.	
7	samdhan	SoWiMo, DaHuMo	none	Joking permitted but not called by name
8	berbānī	Wi	are, teknonymy	
9	sālā	WiBr or wife's male cousin, BrWiBr	b.n.	Also used as a term of abuse
10	sālāhelī	WiBrWi	b.n.	Joking permitted
11	sālī	WiYSi	b.n.	Joking permitted
12	baṛsās	WiESi	none	Strict avoidance
13	sāḍhū	WiSiHu	b.n.	
14	gharvālā	Hu	teknonymy	
15	sauk	HuWi	b.n., bahin	Sauk is a term of abuse

* *Explanation of abbreviations* : Br, brother; EBr, elder brother; YBr, younger brother; Si, sister; ESi, elder sister; YSi, younger sister; Hu, husband; Wi, wife; Fa, father; Mo, mother; So, son; Da, daughter; b.n., by name; aff., affectionate; m.s., man speaking; w.s., woman speaking: (speaker's sex indicated only where significant).

TABLE 9 (*Contd.*)

No.	*Term of reference*	*Genealogical relationship*	*Term of address*	*Remarks*
16	devar	HuYBr or husband's younger male cousin	b.n.	Joking permitted
17	devrānī	HuYBrWi	b.n.	
18	jeṭh	HuEBr or husband's elder male cousin	none	Strict avoidance
19	jeṭhānī	HuEBrWi	b n.	
20	nanad	HuSi or husband's female cousin	b.n.	
21	nandeū	HuSiHu	b.n.	Joking permitted
GROUP B				
22	bāp	Fa, MoHu	bābo; kāko or tāū for MoHu; aff. buḍḍhā	
23	mā	Mo, FaWi	māī; māī or māosī for FaWi	
24	tāū	FaEBr or father's elder male cousin	tāū	
25	tāī	FaEBrWi	tāī	
26	kākā	FaYBr or father's younger male cousin	kākā	
27	kākī	FaYBrWi	kākī	
28	phuphī	FaSi, HuFaSi	phuphī	
29	phuphā	FaSiHu, HuFaSiHu	phuphā	
30	māmā	MoBr or mother's male cousin	māmo	

31	māmī	MoBrWi	māmī	
32	māosī	MoSi or mother's female cousin, FaWi	māosī, mā	
33	māosā	MoSiHu, SiHuFa	māosā	
34	susrā, ḍokrā	WiFa, WiFaBr, HuFa, HuFaBr	chaudhrī, w.s. buḍḍhā bāp	Ḍokrā has a slightly less derogatory connotation than susrā
35	sās, ḍokrī	WiMo, WiMoSi, HuMo, HuMoSi	m.s. none, w.s. buā	m.s. strict avoidance. Ḍokrī has a slightly less derogatory connotation than sās
GROUP C				
36	dādā	FaFa, FaFaBr, FaMoBr	dādo, aff. buḍḍhā bāp	
37	dādī	FaMo, FaFaSi, FaMoSi	dādī, aff buḍḍhī mā	
38	nānā	MoFa, MoFaBr or mother's father's male cousin	nāno	
39	nānī	MoMo, MoFaBrWi, MoMoSi	nānī	
40	dadsusrā	WiFaFa, WiFaFaBr, HuFaFa	m.s. chaudhrī, w.s. buḍḍhā bāp	
41	dadsās	WiFaMo, HuFaMo	w.s. buā	
42	paṛdādā	FaFaFa	dādā, buḍḍhā bāp	
43	paṛdādī	FaFaMo	dādī, buḍḍhī mā	
44	paṛnānā	MoFaFa, MoFaFaBr	nāno	
45	paṛnānī	MoFaMo, MoFaFaBrWi	nānī	

TABLE 9 (*Contd.*)

No.	*Term of reference*	*Genealogical relationship*	*Term of address*	*Remarks*
GROUP D				
46	beṭā	So, spouse's So, WiBrSo, WiSiSo, SoWiBr	b.n., chhorā, lālā	
47	beṭī	Da, spouse's Da, DaHuSi, WiBrDa, WiSiDa	b,n., chhorī, lālī	
48	bhatījā	BrSo	b.n., chhorā, lālā	
49	bhatījā-bahū	BrSoWi, HuBrSoWi	b.n.	
50	bhatījī	BrDa	b.n., chhorī, lālī	
51	bhānjā	SiSo, HuSiSo	b n,, lālā	
52	bhānjā-bahū	SiSoWi, HuSiSoWi	b.n.	
53	bhānjī	SiDa, HuSiDa	b.n., lālī	
54	asnāo	DaHu, DaHuBr, SoDaHu, SoSoDaHu	b.n.	
55	navāsā, dheotā	DaSo	b.n , lālā	Dheotā is more commonly used by educated people
56	navāsī, dheotī	DaDa	b n., lālī	Dheotī is more commonly used by educated people
57	potā	SoSo	b.n., lālā	
58	potī	SoDa	b.n., lālī	
59	pot-bahū	SoSoWi	b.n.	
60	paṛpotā	SoSoSo	b.n., lālā	
61	paṛpotī	SoSoDa	b.n., lālī	

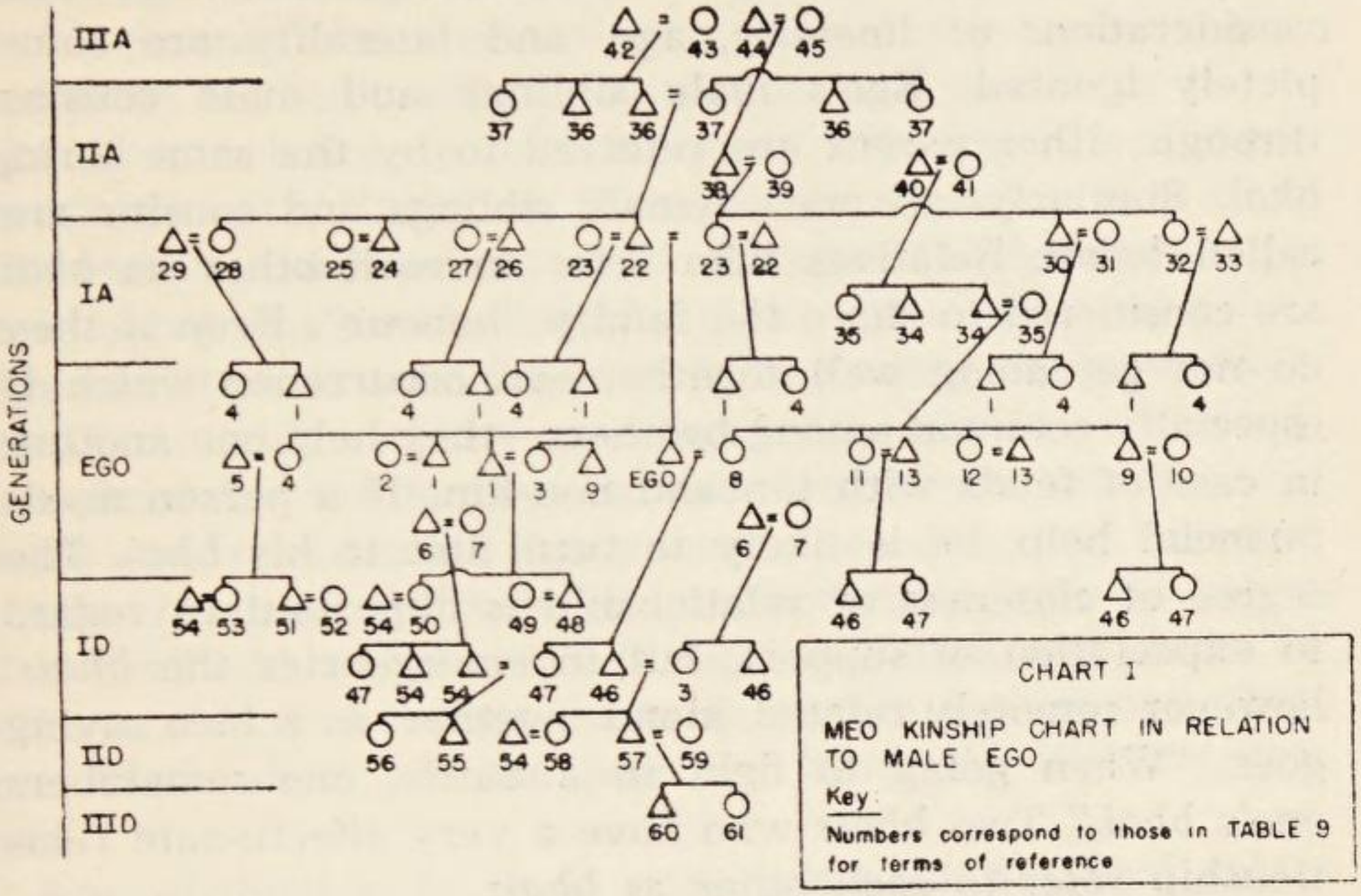


CHART I

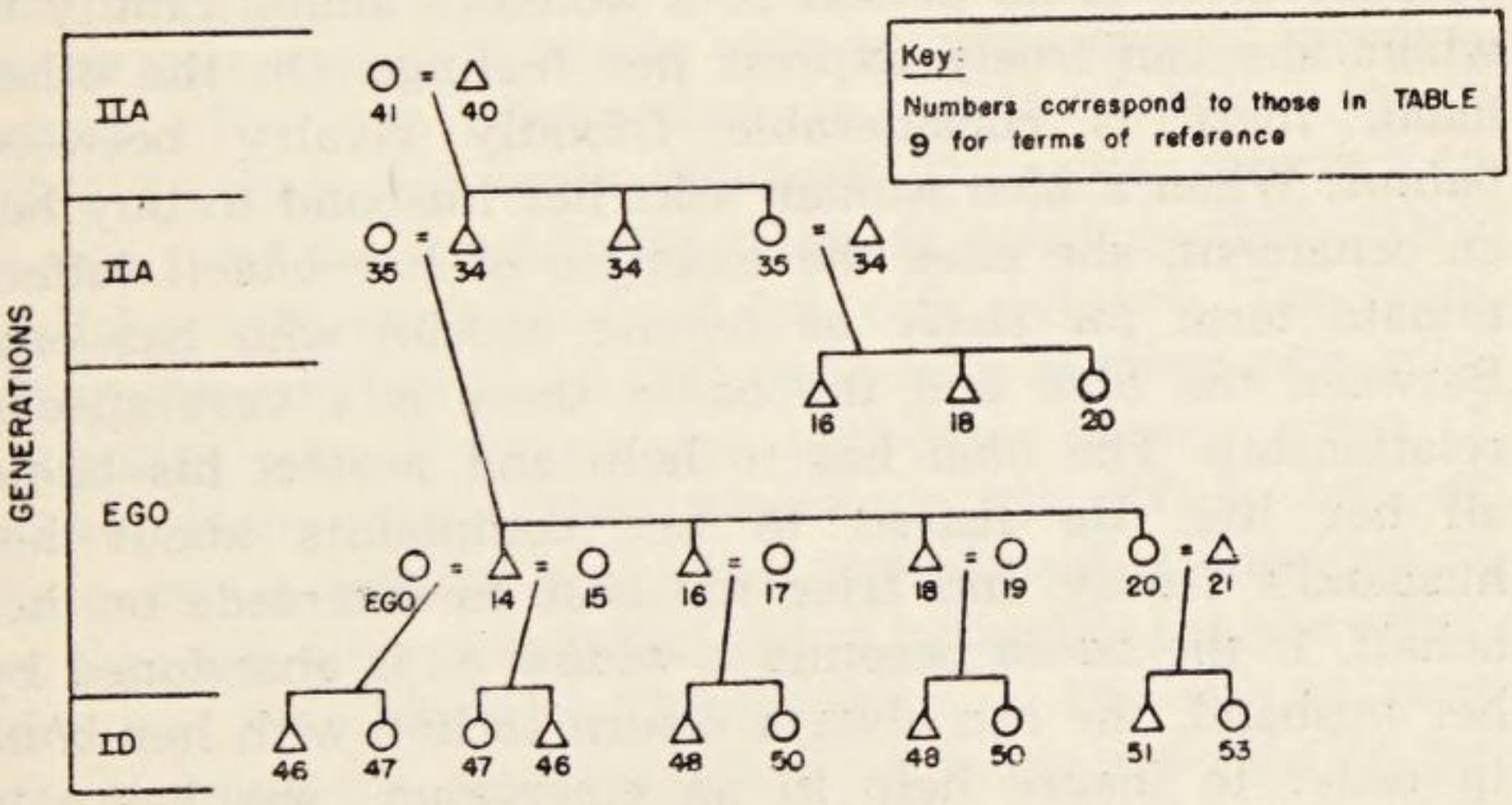
MEO KINSHIP CHART IN RELATION TO MALE EGO

Key

Numbers correspond to those in TABLE 9 for terms of reference

CHART II

MEO KINSHIP CHART IN RELATION TO FEMALE EGO



Key:

Numbers correspond to those in TABLE 9 for terms of reference

always referred to by separate kin terms. However, within each of these categories relatives are distinguished in a variety of ways. Among one's consanguineal relatives, considerations of lineality, age, and laterality are completely ignored. Ego's male siblings and male cousins through either parent are referred to by the same term, *bhai*. Similarly, all one's female siblings and cousins are called *babin*. Relatives who refer to each other as *bhai* are considered to share the family "honour". Even if they do not get along well together—an occurrence which is especially common among brothers—they help one another in case of feuds with kin and non-kin. If a person needs financial help, he is likely to turn first to his *bhai*. The degree of closeness of relationship is important in regard to expectation of support, but in emergencies the *bhais*, however remotely related, stand together: as a Meo saying goes, "When going to fight in a battle, one remembers one's *bhai*." Two *bhais* who have a very affectionate relationship refer to each other as *bhair*.

The females who refer to each other as *bahin* have very affectionate ties. Virilocality scatters the *bahins* after marriage, but they eagerly wait for re-unions when the family news will be exchanged. This is especially valuable because there is no person in a woman's affinal family to whom she can freely express her feelings. On the other hand, there is considerable friendly rivalry between *bahins*. When a Meo woman asks her husband to buy her an ornament, she cites the example of her *bhaeli* (affectionate term for sister or female cousin) who has one. Between the *bhai* and the *bahin* there is a very special relationship. The *bhai* has to help and protect his *bahin* all her life. He listens to her complaints about her husband's family and tries his best to intercede on her behalf. If the *bahin* becomes a widow or is abandoned by her husband, she can always return to live with her *bhai*. In order to insure help in an emergency, she keeps in close touch with her *bhai* and his family. He, in turn, is expected to be indulgent to her and her children.

While age distinction is ignored with regard to cousins

and siblings, it does enter into the terms for their spouses because of the differences in the expected behaviour. A male Ego refers to his elder brother's wife as *bhabi* and to his younger brother's wife as *bahu;* the term *bahu* also refers to his son's wife, and strict mutual avoidance is required in relation to both his son's wife and his younger brother's wife. *Bhabi,* on the other hand, refers to a class of relatives with whom one can joke. Furthermore, one can marry one's widowed *bhabi* but not a widowed *bahu.* An exception is sometimes made regarding one's younger brother's widow when marriage with her is considered beneficial for the family, but one may never marry one's son's widow. A female Ego refers to her elder and younger brothers' wives as *bhabi* and to her son's wife as *bahu,* Her brothers' wives refer to her as *nanad,* and there is always rivalry between them. A woman makes sure that her *bhabi* does not dampen her brother's affection for her.

Age distinction is made concerning one's affinal relatives. A male Ego distinguishes between his wife's elder and younger sisters (or female cousins) and refers to them as *barsas* and *sali* respectively. Strict avoidance is expected in relation to a *barsas,* whereas joking is permitted with one's *sali.* Also, a widower may marry his *sali,* but he can marry a *barsas* only in very special circumstances. No age distinction is made between one's wife's brothers (or male cousins). They are referred to as *sala,* and no special deference is owed to them. One can joke with one's *sala* and his wife, *salaheli.* The term *sala* is also used in abuse: if a man calls another man *sala,* it implies sexual intercourse with the latter's sister. I noticed many times that whenever two Meos, one of whom was a *sala* of the other, introduced themselves to me, the *sala* always quickly added jokingly that the other individual was his *sala.* This is done by the *sala* to save himself from the embarrassment of being referred to by a word of abuse. The *behnoi* (sister's husband) is expected not to protest the wrong statement, but a person familiar with the system can judge the correct relationship. To a

sister's husband one traditionally owes a great deal of deference, but this is changing. A man came to Chavandi Kalan for the fourth time to take his wife back to his village. He felt quite irritated when his *saĩa* refused to send her on a certain day, and left the village in anger. When I asked the *sala* if he was worried about his sister's husband's anger, he replied: "No, not at all. *Sala* refused to wait even for a couple of more days. If he cares, he will come back for the fifth time for my sister. We must treat the *behnoi* strictly. Otherwise they become too proud and lose respect for their wives. Now he will treat my sister better because he knows that we will brook no nonsense." One refers to one's brother's *sala* as *sala* and can joke with him as with one's own. A joking relationship also exists between a man and his wife's sister's husband, *sadhu*.

The term for "wife" is *berbani*, which is also the term for "woman". This is significant in that it indicates the tenuous position of the woman in her affinal household. Her function is to bear children for her husband's family, and her status grows with the birth of her children, especially males. A husband never calls his wife by name, and he often hesitates to mention her name even in her absence. He refers to her by her parents' *gotra* or by her natal village, e.g., "Chavandi-ki", which literally means "woman of Chavandi". The term of address for wife is *are*, a common term similar to the English "hey" when used to call someone's attention. The husband is referred to as *gharvala*, which literally means "one who owns or belongs to the household". In a polygynous household, the co-wives refer to each other as *sauk*, and the term implies constant quarrelling. It is also used as a term of abuse for women who are quarrelling with other women, including their own daughters.

A female Ego must distinguish between her husband's elder and younger *bhais*. The younger brothers of the husband are *devar*, and joking is permitted with them. A woman's husband's older brother is *jeth*, and mutual avoidance is mandatory. A distinction is also made between

the terms used for the wives of her husband's older and younger brothers. A woman has to show more respect to her husband's older brother's wife, *jethani,* than she does to his younger brother's wife, *devrani.* No distinction is made between her *nanads,* her husband's sisters and female cousins, with regard to age. She has a joking relationship with the husbands of these women, *nandeu.*

The parents of one's son's or daughter's spouse are referred to as *samdhi* (male) and *samdhan* (female). Here, although no terminological distinction is made, a male Ego is expected to treat his daughter's husband's parents with a considerably greater amount of deference than that used towards his son's in-laws, but the difference has narrowed in recent years. A female Ego, however, has always been allowed to joke with the *samdhi* related to her through her daughter.

Group B

The sixteen terms of reference in this group refer to relatives in the first ascending generation in relation to Ego. The criterion of laterality is of consequence, and matrilateral relatives are distinguished from those related through one's father. One has different rights and duties with regard to one's patrilateral and matrilateral uncles. All the matrilateral uncles are *mamas* and their spouses *mamis,* regardless of age in relation to one's mother. The relationship with one's *mama* is emotionally very close, and young children especially value their indulgent attention. Thanks to patrilocal residence, one visits the *mama* only occasionally; and the *mama* does not have to discipline his sister's children. A Meo child returning from a visit to its mother's brothers is often very unhappy for some time. The child notices the difference in the treatment it gets and it wants to return to its *mama.* As a child grows older and assumes family responsibilities. its relationship with the mother's brother become weaker, but the tenor of indulgence continues in their relationship. One's mother's sisters, *maosis,* also are very indulgent, but patrilocality makes one's contact with them even less

frequent than with the *mama*. The relationship with one's mother's sister's husband, *maosa*, tends to be less close.

Ego's patrilateral uncles have a rather formal relationship with him. They do have the right to discipline him, but only in exceptional circumstances would they do so. However, one shares the family honour with one's patrilateral uncles and can count on their support in feuds and in elections. Age distinction is important, and one's father's elder brother, *tau*, and his wife, *tai*, are terminologically distinguished from his younger brother, *kaka*, and his wife, *kaki*. In a collateral joint family household, the oldest among the brothers becomes the head of the family: for his greater authority this *tau* is owed more deference. The deference one owes to one's *kaka* is a great deal less. Their wives are treated very much like a mother.

One's father's sisters are *phuphis*, and their husbands *phuphas*, regardless of age in relation to one's father. A *phuphi* is expected to indulge her nephews and nieces and so she establishes a warm relationship with them. After she is married, she maintains this relationship by frequent visits and by performing certain ritual services at the life cycle rites of her nephews and later by bringing gifts when children are born to the latter. A *phupha* often accompanies his wife on these visits but he has no close relationship with his wife's brother's children.

Since descent is traced through the male line among the Meos, lineality is important, and one's father, *bap*, is distinguished from his brothers. The father represents the major authority figure in the nuclear family unit among the Meos. Even in a joint family household he has the prerogative of disciplining his children, who are always identified in relation to him as, for example, "son of Ghotu". If a mother or an uncle discovers that a child has been disobedient, the father is informed of it, and it is up to him to punish the child. A mother, *ma*, is often very indulgent towards her children. A Meo saying, which expresses this relationship, runs thus: "When sick [i.e., helpless], one remembers one's mother."

The affinal relatives in this group are referred to as

susra (male) and *sas* (female) regardless of the speaker's sex. These terms of reference are not very respectful and are, therefore, never used in address. For reference, the alternate set of terms, *dokra* and *dokri*, are somewhat more respectful. A male Ego addresses his wife's father as *chaudhri*, a rather formal term of respect used for prominent non-kin and strangers. There is no term of address for one's wife's mother, since mutual avoidance is the prevailing rule and one is not expected to converse with her. Women used to cover their faces in the presence of their sons-in-law, but this practice is becoming less common now.

A female Ego addresses her husband's mother, his father's sisters, and his father's brother's wives as *bua*, and his father as *buddha bap*. However, since she must avoid her father-in-law, she seldom needs to address him. She uses the term *buddha bap* in indirect address through a child. She would ask a child to convey a message to the *buddha bap* by talking loudly enough so that the old man could hear her. He, in turn, replies to her queries in a similar manner through the child. A female Ego does not distinguish between her husband's father and his uncles on the basis of age.

Group C

For the members of the second and third ascending generations there are only ten terms of reference. In these generations one distinguishes between the father's and the mother's parents and grandparents. One's father's parents and their cousins are *dada* (male) and *dadi* (female), and those of the mother *nana* (male) and *nani* (female). *Nana* and *nani* are one's indulgent grandparents. Children are always nostalgic about their *nana's* house. One has a fairly pleasant relationship with one's father's parents and grandparents, but their authority rather dampens the warmth. Nevertheless, a child turns to its *dada* for companionship and spends many a memorable hour listening to his bedtime stories. Especially when a person is very old, he devotes a great deal of attention to his grandchildren

The relatives in one's great-grandparental generation are *pardada* and *pardadi* on the father's side and *parnana* and *parnani* on the mother's side. One's relationship with these kin is very similar to that with one's grandparents. One's affinals in Group C are referred to by the same terms as one's affinal in the parental generation (Group B), and no behavioural distinctions are made between these two groups.

Group D

The kin terms for the various descending generations appear in Group D. In the first descending generation, lineality is important. One's sons, *betas*, and daughters, *betis*, are distinguished from one's brother's and sister's children, who are further differentiated from each other. These distinctions are crucial with regard to inheritance as well as mutual rights and duties. A son has the first claim to his father's property; then come the brother's sons, and last of all the sister's sons. One has almost the sole responsibility to discipline one's sons and only in special circumstances one's brother's sons, *bhatijas*, and daughters, *bhatijis*. But one's sister's sons, *bhanjas*, and daughters, *bhanjis*, must always be indulged and helped in case of need. One's wife's sister's sons and daughters are terminologically merged with one's own offspring; this relationship is relatively unimportant, and the terms *beta* and *beti* are used for them in a rather generic sense. One uses these terms in this sense also for non-relatives of the appropriate generation.

The term *bahu*, which appears in Group A, is also used to refer to one's son's wife. One's brother's and sister's sons' wives are also one's *bahus* as far as the behaviour expectations are concerned; but in order to distinguish between them, the term *bhatija* or *bhanja* is prefixed to the term *bahu*. These distinctions are more important for a woman speaker because she has a far greater authority over her *bahu* (son's wife) than over her *bhanja-bahu* or *bhatija-bahu*.

The husbands of one's daughter, brother's daughter,

sister's daughter, son's son's daughter, etc., are referred to by a single kin term, *asnao*. An *asnao*, in whatever way related, has to be treated with particular attention. Special food has to be prepared for him when he visits, and one must avoid offending him. However, as the importance of women is increasing, people tend to treat the *asnao* more casually. The relationship with one's daughter's son, *navasa* or *dheota*, and with one's daughter's daughter *navasi* or *dheoti*, is always more indulgent than with one's son's son, *pota*, and daughter, *poti*. One's son's son's wife, *pot-bahu*, is treated in the same way as one's son's wife. Exceptional affection is shown towards one's son's son's son, *parpota*, and daughter, *parpoti*. A Meo saying highlights this relationship with one's grandchildren or great-grandchildren: "The interest is more dear than the principal."

Chapter 9

RELIGION

RELIGIOUS PRACTITIONERS

SIX religious practitioners, for some of whom it is a full-time occupation, serve the Meos of Chavandi Kalan. Three of them are Muslim and three Hindu. All except one live in the village. The role of each of these functionaries has been changing in the years since 1947. Some have gained in importance, and others are now less patronized.

The Mullah

The word "mullah" means a scholar well versed in Muslim religious literature. In the village context, he is a person who has received training in the performance of Muslim rituals and who functions as a religious practitioner. A distinction is made between a mullah and a *maulvi*. The latter holds a degree from an accredited religious school where he spends eight to ten years learning Arabic and Persian as well as the entire body of the Muslim religious literature. Slightly higher than the mullah and lower than the *maulvi*, is the *hafiz*, a person who has at least once learned the *Koran* by heart. All the three can become religious practitioners, and any Muslim, regardless of caste, can seek religious training at any of these levels.

Chavandi Kalan has a mullah and a *hafiz*. The mullah is a Meo by caste, and the *hafiz* a Faqir. Before 1947, there were several families of Faqirs in the village, some of whose members provided religious services to the Meos. In 1950, when the Muslims returned to Alwar and Bharatpur, the Meos were the first to come. In Chavandi Kalan, too, the Meos who owned land preceded the non-Meo Muslims. For several years thereafter, the village had no Muslim religious practitioner. Kalu Khan, a Meo, saw in this a lucrative opportunity and went to a religious school in Ferozepur Jhirka for a year's training. On the

completion of his studies he started practice in the village and still continues to do so. He owns about eighteen *bighas* of land, and has his professsional income as well.

Kalu Khan has the sole charge of one of the two mosques in the village. Though his mosque is *kachcha*, as it is within the village it has become more popular than the *pakka* mosque on the eastern edge of the settlement. He is expected to lead prayers five times a day according to scriptural instruction; but since very few Meos pray regularly, Kalu Khan can conveniently omit the daytime prayers. He does, however, hold prayers at least twice a day, especially when the farmers are not tied down to such work as harvesting. Until about three years ago Kalu Khan used also to lead large gatherings at the Friday prayers held at the *jumma masjid* (mosque for special prayers) in Dautana, a nearby village. In addition, he used to officiate at the Id prayers twice a year at the *jumma masjid*, a service for which he was richly rewarded by gifts of clothes and money. In 1961, a *hafiz* had replaced him for both the Friday and Id prayers.

In addition to leading prayers, Kalu Khan occasionally performs Nikah (Muslim marriage ritual) for the local Meos. He is by no means popular for performing marriages; but whenever a family wants a quiet and quick ceremony, it calls upon Kalu Khan and have the Nikah performed for a small fee. The Meos do not take him seriously as a religious practitioner, for he is a castemate and a farmer who practises religion part-time.

Kalu Khan works as a shaman, usually to cure animals, but he claims that he can also cure humans. His major technique is *jhara* (literally, shaking off; exorcism). When a sick animal is brought to him, he sits down by its side with a branch of a *nim* or some such tree in his right hand. He told me that he could use the end of his turban as well with the same effect. I watched him treating a goat which, according to the animal's owner, had been bitten by a snake. Kalu Khan rubbed the body of the animal seven times with the branch of the *nim* tree from its stomach towards its hind legs. He mumbled a *nakkash*

(Muslim magical incantation) quickly in a low voice while he brushed the goat. Then he blew over the goat seven times with his mouth, again from its stomach towards its hind quarters. He repeated the brushing and the blowing three times. He refused to tell me the *nakkash* for fear that it would become ineffective if divulged. He, however, said that he could teach it on the twenty-sixth day of Ramzan but hastened to add that mere learning this incantation would not be enough as it was only a part of the curing procedure. According to him, one has to gain supernatural power to make the *nakkash* effective, and for this one has to pray for several days and remain pure by observing certain scriptural rules.

Although Kalu Khan's professional income has been reduced since the arrival of the *hafiz*, he is able to earn additional money through his magical cures. He is not supposed to demand any fee for this, but people pay him anyway. Those who pray at his mosque also occasionally reward him. Encouraged by the initial lucrative professional income, Kalu Khan got his oldest son trained in a religious school. But the boy does not find it very profitable in the face of competition from his father as well as from the *hafiz*.

The Hafiz

Jamaluddin, the *hafiz*, is a young man in his early twenties. He is not married and lives with his parents and two sisters in Chavandi Kalan, his mother's natal village. His original village is Adbar in Nuh *tehsil*. About three years ago, when he visited some friends of his mother's parents in Chavandi Kalan they took him to Dautana for the Friday prayers. Since they knew he was a *hafiz*, they asked him to lead the prayers. As he impressed the congregation, his friends invited him to come and settle down in Chavandi Kalan, which he did with high expectations. But he is now dissatisfied for many people do not give him even his yearly due of grain.

Jamaluddin and his family live in the house meant for the caretaker of the *pakka* mosque. Since the family owns

no land, the members depend mainly on Jamaluddin's income. His father sometimes works as a labourer, but as he has no special skill, his employment is sporadic. The family has fallen on difficult times since coming to Chavandi Kalan, and Jamaluddin has to take to tailoring to augment his income.

One of Jamaluddin's major responsibilities is to lead the daily prayers at the *pakka* mosque. Although he is on hand for all the five prayers, few Meos come to the mosque. Even for the evening prayers people do not come regularly. His persuasion for regular attendance had no effect. A few of the religious-minded young men, who live near the *kuchcha* mosque, prefer to go there.

According to Jamaluddin, even at Dautana the attendance used to be very poor when he first came. Sometimes he was the only one present for prayers. He used to go round the village to remind the people of the Friday prayers. On the Ids, however, there is usually a sizable gathering. This is important for Jamaluddin, for he expects to be well rewarded on these occasions. He is given a suit of clothes and some cash at the rate of one rupee per head.

Soon after migrating to Chavandi Kalan, Jamaluddin started a *madrassa* (Muslim religious school) in the *pakka* mosque. In the beginning the Meos were reluctant to send their children to the school, but slowly they patronized it. In February 1964, the school had fifteen students—eight boys and seven girls—on its rolls. About half the students were from Chavandi Kalan and the rest from Dautana. The school was held in the morning from 8.00 to 10.00 on all days except Friday. The students were first taught the Arabic alphabet. Then they learned to read the *Koran*, which they finished in about two years. Emphasis was put on reading the text, and no attempt was made to translate or interpret it for it is the prerogative of the *maulvi*. Jamaluddin told me that most of his students lost their reading skill within a year of leaving the school for lack of practice. Most students dropped out of school without completing the course. In three years,

only two of the students finished reading the *Koran*, and Kalu Khan's son was one of them.

Jamaluddin is also a practising shaman. He told me that he learned the skill while he was a trainee at a *madrassa* in Delhi. Once he prayed continuously for forty days. Since then he has tried to remain "pure", and that was the reason for his *nakkash* being effective. He can cure all kinds of sickness, including emotional disturbances. He cannot, however, treat people who are bothered by the *jinn* (invisible beings). To have control over these creatures, according to him, one should possess special skills, also acquired through prayer and purity of conduct. Jamaluddin could have gone on to learn those skills, but his parents were too poor to afford the expense. With the skills he presently has, however, he claims he can cure most of the ordinary sicknesses in animals and humans.

Jamaluddin talks of his successes readily: "Some time ago Kalu Khan's sister-in-law was in trouble. She had lost love for her husband and wanted to elope with another man. I gave her a *nakkash* and it proved effective. She regained her senses and returned to her husband. Kalu Khan's wife gave me ten rupees by way of reward. Accepting money for this service is not prohibited, but one should not demand payment. If someone rewards me of his own accord, I accept the gift." On another occasion he told me: "A man suffering from chronic headache came to me. He is a Sikh from a neighbouring village. He had tried many doctors, but none had been able to cure him. I gave him an herb concoction and a magical formula. He is now quite well, and is my patron."

Jamaluddin also slaughters chickens and goats for the Meos of the village. He knows the correct Islamic slaughtering technique and the appropriate chants that have to be uttered at the time of slaughtering. As a reward for this service he gets the head of the animal and occasionally some meat besides. He told me: "These Meos are careless. They slaughter most of the animals themselves but improperly. They do not care to call me or my father. The only time they call us is on the occasion

of a *khairat* [a feast given for charitable purposes]."

For more than one reason Jamaluddin is dissatisfied with the people of Chavandi Kalan: "These Meos are like wild animals. They have no regard for religion. They do not pray regularly. I have been running a *madrassa* in the village for several years, but they still do not send their children. They would rather send them to graze animals. My efforts to educate them have been in vain so far. I am so fed up that I am going to leave the village soon." In August 1964, he did leave Chavandi Kalan and started a *madrassa* in a nearby village.

The Faqir

We have earlier discussed the social and economic role of the Faqir family in Chavandi Kalan. However, since the local Faqir, the father of Jamaluddin, does not perform all his normal duties, the Meos of the village utilize the services of a Faqir from Dautana. The major occupation of the Faqir is to beg by going from door to door every morning. But he also performs two other important services for the Meos: to carry messages of misfortune, such as announcements of death, to relatives in other villages, which brings more generous treatment on his daily begging rounds by the family concerned; and to prepare the dead body for burial according to Muslim practice for which he receives all the clothes of the deceased, his bedding, and other personal effects.

The Kherapati Brahman

The work of the Kherapati Brahman is fully described in Chapter 7: he still functions more or less within the traditional *jajmani* arrangements.

The Dakot

The special work of the Dakot has also been described earlier in the discussion of the *jajmani* arrangements. However, he performs an additional important function for the Meos. During the Muharram celebrations, described in detail later in this chapter, one of the Dakots acts as

the *ustad* (teacher) of the men that enact the role of *painks* (Husain's soldiers). His late father used to be an *ustad* and was considered to be an exceptionally able person for the job since he knew by heart many *maurasia* (songs lamenting the death of Husain and his infant son and condemning his opponents) and took much interest in training the *painks* of Chavandi Kalan. The son inherited these duties, although he is much less skilful. Nevertheless, he is looked upon as an *ustad* and is called upon whenever the *painks* need help. For his services he is rewarded out of the money collected by the *painks* and the Meos try to be generous when he comes to beg for *puli* at harvest time. Though he is a Hindu, his function on the occasion of this Muslim festival is readily acknowledged by the Meos. The services of the Dakot at Muharram are indispensable, because the Muslim religious practitioners of the village, being Sunni, hesitate to officiate at Muharram, a Shia festival.

The Bairagi

One of the members of the Bairagi family in Chavandi Kalan is also a practising shaman. He claims to be able to exorcise *bhut* (ghosts) when they possess people. But he is getting old and is losing interest in his work. His son, who has had some education, refused to enter his father's profession. Because of his old age people rarely come to him for treatment, but it is also true that they no longer so much believe in ghosts.

TOMBS AND PLACES OF WORSHIP

Chavandi Kalan has no Hindu temple. However, there are two Hindu shrines, used by all the villagers, including the Meos. One of these is known as Mata-Mai or Devi, a small shrine in honour of the Hindu goddesses believed to control pustular diseases such as smallpox. These goddesses are propitiated at the festival of Basora in the month of Chait (March-April) as a preventive measure and also worshipped in gratitude following a person's recovery from smallpox. In recent years incidence of smallpox

has been reduced drastically through inoculation; as a result, the Mata-Mai shrine is ignored by the villagers. The second Hindu shrine is the *pipal* tree near the popular village well. A stone platform has been built around the tree, but there is no image. In the past, when it was a more popular place of worship, stone representations of various Hindu gods were placed on the platform. The *pipal* is watered on every *amavas* (moonless day), especially on the occasion of the festival of the Manani Amavas in Kvar (September-October).

Compared with the Hindu shrines, the Muslim places of worship are numerous and elaborate. There are two mosques and nine *turbats* (tombs of Muslim religious men) in Chavandi Kalan. Very little is known about the lives of these men and the reasons for their sainthood. The spirits associated with three of these tombs—Hadiri, Tegri, and Tegra—are believed to be inactive now. The spirits or ghosts which had formerly occupied them have presumably abandoned them and do not trouble people any more. The spirits associated with the remaining six tombs, however, are believed to be still active, causing sickness in animals and people: their disposition is believed to be malicious because these are spirits of individuals who met violent deaths or who died unhappy about something. There is, therefore, a suspicion that they contemplate revenge unless propitiated. Whenever it is suspected that a spirit is causing illness in some person or animal, one has first to identify the responsible spirit and propitiate it by offering gifts of food or clothes. In Chavandi Kalan, two persons—a Meo woman and a Chamar man—specialize in identifying these spirits. Both use the same method—*nala nikalna*. A balance is held up in one hand, and grains of wheat or barley are dropped into one of the pans. As each grain is dropped, the name of a spirit is mentioned. The last name mentioned before the scale tips is assumed to be the responsible spirit: one then makes an offering of something known to be the favourite of the spirit.

A Meo informant told me: "These spirits do cause all

kinds of problems. One causes milk to go bad—suddenly the milk of a buffalo or cow goes bad. You propitiate the spirit, and it does not happen any more. I recently visited some relatives who now live in Pakistan, and I learned from them that the spirits of Chavandi Kalan are active even there. The same spirits cause the same kinds of problems and accept the same kind of offerings."

The various Muslim spirits in the village have their peculiar ways. They seem to specialize in causing certain troubles and are very particular about what they will accept by way of gifts. In order to bring out the peculiarities of these spirits, each of them is described separately.

The Sayyad[1]

The structure erected in honour of the Sayyad is situated in the heart of the village. It is believed that the spirit of a Sayyad saint, who might have once lived in the village, resides in it. Nobody in Chavandi Kalan knew anything about the Sayyad until about ten years ago when the site was purchased by its present owner. Just before the property was sold, the Sayyad appeared in a dream to the owner and warned him of dire consequences if he accepted money in return for the property. The Sayyad obviously regarded the sale as an insult, but the young owner of the property disregarded the warning. For some years the Sayyad appeared occasionally, each time in a dream, to the new owners and asked for offerings. He had also repeated the warning to the previous owner and his brother. Recently both the brothers died of tuberculosis, and the villagers believe that the Sayyad thus took his revenge.

No one knows exactly where the Sayyad's grave is located. Recently, the family that owns the property put up a few stones as a marker on one side of their dwelling. This spot serves as the Sayyad's tomb. The members of the family, particularly the women, light lamps near the

1. The highest caste among the Muslims. The Prophet Muhammad belonged to this caste.

marker and offer *syanak* (offering) of cooked sweet food to the Sayyad every Thursday evening just after sunset. Sometimes other families of the village also make offerings. The food is brought to the Sayyad's stone marker, the mullah prays over it and praises the Sayyad, and then it is distributed among the children as *tabrak* (food that has been offered to the supernaturals).

One Meo man is especially concerned about the Sayyad, and he occasionally offers *galep* (gift of a piece of cloth), in addition to *syanak*, at the tomb. This man often becomes possessed by the spirit of a Sayyad saint of another village, Sirmoli, and believes that there is some relationship between the two spirits. So, out of fear he tries to keep the local Sayyad pacified.

The Sayyad is believed to be capable of causing illness in man and beast and also to be able to cure illnesses of all kinds. Thus, on the one hand, people try to keep the Sayyad happy so that he will not cause any trouble to them and their families, and, on the other, they promise offerings to him if he will cure their illnesses by using his healing powers.

The Hajji Pir

The tomb of Hajji Pir is far more elaborate than that of the Sayyad, and is situated near the panchayat *ghar*. It consists of a stone platform with a raised hump in the middle to mark the grave. At the head of the grave there is a stone wall about five feet high with pigeon holes in it for small earthen lamps. Hajji Pir was a Faqir of Chavandi Kalan who had become a *darvesh* (one who abandons wordly matters and devotes himself to God) following a pilgrimage to Mecca. His tomb was built soon after his death, which is believed to have occurred several decades ago, and has been kept in good repair ever since. People often have it swept and washed as part of the attempt to propitiate the spirit.

Hajji Pir is believed to make animals sick by entering their bodies, especially those of cows and buffaloes, with the result that the animals refuse to yield milk. Some-

times he can cause their milk go bad. In humans, particularly in children, he usually causes sore eyes. He is propitiated by offerings of sweet food and symbolic bits of clothing. The food is later distributed among the villagers that assemble at the tomb.

The spirit of Hajji Pir is the one most frequently appealed to for granting wishes. If a person wants a child, or recovery of an ailing relative, or even success in elections, he may solicit Hajji Pir's help and may promise *syanak* or *galep* in return.

Dada Buland Khan[2]

The tomb of Dada Buland Khan is situated in the hills about one and a half kilometres from the village. He was also a Faqir by caste who had become a *darvesh* and is said to have performed miracles. The villagers were so much impressed with him that they built an elaborate stone structure over his grave. This occurred at some time in the distant past, prior to the memory of any living villager. His spirit is believed to reside in the tomb and to be quite active.

Like most others, the spirit of Dada Buland Khan also enters animals and humans and causes sickness. He can be pacified by offers of various kinds of food and clothes. Dada Buland Khan is also believed to have control over the elements, especially rain. Every year, just before the beginning of the rainy season, the people of Chavandi Kalan make a collective offering of food to him. The organization of this offering has been described earlier in this study.

Dada Raizada Khera

Dada Raizada Khera was a Khanzada saint from a prominent family of Chavandi Kalan. His tomb is situated at the foot of the hills not very far from that of Dada Buland Khan. Although he is not any more active, he

2. Dada literally means "grandfather", but is here used as a title with the saint's name.

does occasionally cause sickness in animals and sore eyes in children. He is also propitiated through *syanak*.

Dada Baradarivala

The tomb of Dada Baradarivala (literally, saint of the twelve windows) is situated inside of the *pakka* mosque and is the most elaborate structure of its kind in the village. Around the tomb is a massive wall with twelve windows, from which the name of the tomb is derived. The spirit that resides here is that of a Faqir who used to be in charge of the village mosque. It is believed that he, too, enters animals and humans with malicious intent.

A special feature of this tomb is the provision of a *kundi* (stone vessel) near the grave. In addition to offerings to the spirit of the saint, people wash the *kundi* and take that water home to sprinkle over ailing animals and men. The water is supposed to be very effective in curing the patient.

Dada Pachbir

Dada Pachbir was a Faqir of Chavandi Kalan whose *turbat* is situated near the *pakka* mosque. His spirit is believed to reside in his tomb, but it is unique in the sense that it is not malevolent. Dada Pachbir does not cause sickness, but he can cure it. People pour water over the grave and then collect it to sprinkle over ailing individuals or animals for curing them. While the water is good for all kinds of illness, it is a sure balm for skin diseases such as eczema. There is a small pond near the tomb, and it is believed that mud from this pond has curative properties for boils and eczema.

The spirits residing in the tombs of Muslim saints are mostly propitiated by the Meos and other Muslim castes, but Hindus also make offerings to them. However, the Hindus now tend to do this less frequently just as the Muslims are moving away from the Hindu shrines.

CALENDRICAL RITES

The Meos of Chavandi Kalan celebrated at least sixteen Hindu and Muslim festivals during 1964. In some of them

all the other castes of the village participated, and in others only a few did. It was clear that the Meos were devoting increasing attention to the Muslim observances and becoming ambivalent about the Hindu ones. Whenever both Hindu and Muslim festivals coincided, preference was given to the latter. If a Muslim festival preceded a Hindu festival by even a few days, it reduced their enthusiasm for the latter.

Table 10 lists all the festivals celebrated during 1964 and they are briefly described below.[3]

Sankranti

On 14 January 1964, the Hindus and the Sikhs of the village celebrated a festival known locally as "Sankranti" and elsewhere in north India as "Makar Sankranti".[4] Sankranti literally means "the first of the month", which is the time when all Hindus are supposed to perform certain religious functions. This particular calendrical rite, however, may not fall on the first of the Hindu month, for its date is computed by the solar calendar. In fact, it always falls on January 14, when the sun enters Capricornus (a sign of the zodiac) on the ecliptic. Since it is a relatively leisure time of the year for the farmers, festivities are extended throughout the day. People begin the day with a bath, despite the cold, and put on new or clean clothes. Every family cooks its favourite sweet dish such as rice pudding or *halva*. The high castes give sweet food to the Kherapati Brahman—a highly meritorious act. The Sikhs give no food to the Brahman, but exchange sweets among themselves.

Hindu women visit the temple in a nearby village about noon and make an offering of food and flowers to the

3. Since neither the Hindu nor the Muslim calendar coincides exactly with the Western calendar, the dates of these festivals will vary from year to year on the Western calendar.

4. Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1958, p. 227.

TABLE 10

Hindu and Muslim calendrical rites celebrated in Chavandi Kalan in 1964

Name of festival	*Western calendar date*	*Hindu calendar date**	*Muslim calendar date*
Sankrānti	January 14	Māgh 1st	—
Ramzān	January 16 to February 14	—	9th month (Ramzān)
Id-ul-Fitr or Semiān-vālī-Id	February 15	—	Usually 1st of the 10th month
Basant Panchmī	January 19	Māgh-sudi 5th	—
Holī	February 28	Phāgun—purnamāshī	—
Basoṛā	March 5	Chait 7th	—
Amāvas	April 12	Chait-amāvas	—
Id-ul-Zuhā or Bakar-Id	April 23	—	10th day of the 12th month
Muharram	May 18-23	—	First ten days of the 1st month
Halsotiā	July-August	Sāvan (first heavy rain)	—
Tīj	August 10	Sāvan-sudi 3rd	—
Rākhī	August 23	Bhādon purnamāshī	—
Mānanī Amāvas or Kanāgati Amāvas	October 5	Kvār-amāvas	—
Chhaṭ	September 12	Bhādon-sudi 6th	—
Divālī	November 4	Kārtik-amāvas	—
Shabrāt	December 19	—	14th day of the 8th month

* *sudi*=the bright half of the moon's monthly cycle; *purnamāshī*=the full-moon day; *amāvas*=the moonless day.

deity. In the afternoon, the Bania and the Brahman women visit one another's houses, in a group singing in chorus as they walk the village streets. The daughters-in-law give to their mothers-in-law new saris provided by their parents.

The Meos of Chavandi Kalan seem not to celebrate Sankranti, but I learned that some families cook a sweet dish. According to an aged villager, the Meos used to celebrate this festival before 1947 just as the Hindus, but have since given it up slowly. In 1964, the Meos were particularly reluctant to celebrate Sankranti: Ramzan (the Muslim month of fasting) was to begin only two days later, which seemed to emphasize the contrast and the need to choose.

Ramzan

The entire ninth month, Ramzan, of the Islamic calendar is a period of fasting for the Muslims. According to popular belief, the special significance of Ramzan is that the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation on the twenty-seventh day of this month. However, in pre-Islamic Arabia this month was considered sacred, and this Arabic tradition was taken over by Islam: Von Grunebaum suggests that "it seems likely that the *lailat al-qadr* [Muhammad's first revelation] fell in Ramadan [i.e., Ramzan] because of the age-old sanctity of the month. . ."[5]

In 1964, Ramzan began on January 16 and ended on February 14. During Ramzan the Muslims observe *roza* (a complete fast) in the daylight hours. They may eat before sunrise and after sunset, but during the day they must not eat, drink, or smoke. The Meos of Chavandi Kalan recognize this custom, but very few observe it.

Generally, outside of Mewat, older Muslim people tend to be more religious and, therefore, more regular in fasting. But the reverse is true in Chavandi Kalan. The older

5. Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Muhammadan Festivals*, New York, Henry Schuman, 1951, pp. 55-56.

Meos do not fast, whereas a few young men in their twenties do. It is easy to find out who is fasting because most Meo males smoke the *hukka* and if they are fasting they abstain from it. I estimated that seven men fasted for the entire month and four or five for part of the month. Among the regular *rozgirs* (persons who fast) there were the mullah, the *hafiz*, the hajji, the Gram Sevak, and three young men. The irregular *rozgirs* too were young men. The Mullah, the *hafiz*, and the hajji, seasoned in the practice, were able to carry on their normal routine despite the fast. For the young men, however, fasting was difficult and at the same time exciting. To sustain the interest they ate together morning and evening and attended the prayers at the *kachcha* mosque regularly. During the day also they spent much of the time together. Most young Meo men who fasted, regularly or irregularly, were literate and had travelled outside of Mewat. They were very enthusiastic about Ramzan and kept the fasts scrupulously. One day one of these young men slipped and smoked the *hukka* during the day: he was very repentant and offered an extra prayer as a means of exculpation.

That the older Meos do not fast during Ramzan does not imply that they ignore its importance. All Meos in the village praise the *rozgirs*, but plead that the nature of their work is preventing them from fasting. One day, while walking with a young Meo in the fields I asked him if he were fasting. He replied that since he was the only adult male in his family and had to do all the farm work he could not fast. Some Meo women who were working in a nearby field overheard our conversation and thought I was asking the young man not to observe *roza*. One of them shouted at me: "Why do you prevent him from keeping *roza*? It is our religion."

It is considered highly meritorious to give a *khairat* to the *rozgirs* during Ramzan. A Meo family in the village, one of whose members was a regular faster, gave such a feast on the twenty-second day of Ramzan. About 80 kilograms of rice and half as much brown sugar were

used to cook *ganji* (sweet rice). All the *rozgirs* and several other villagers were invited; children too were welcome at the feast.

Id-ul-Fitr

This important Muslim festival is usually celebrated on the first day of the month following Ramzan, signifying the termination of the month of fasting and a day of great joy and holiday activity. It may have to be celebrated a day earlier or later, depending on the appearance of the new moon. According to the religious prescription, Id follows the appearance of the new moon at the end of Ramzan. It is imperative for the Muslims either to see the moon themselves or to learn about its appearence from a reliable person before celebrating the Id-ul-Fitr. Sometimes there is uncertainty with regard to the exact day of Id. In 1965, the festival was celebrated in Mewat on February 3 by some and on February 4 by others. Those who celebrated it on February 4 depended on an announcement over the radio from Pakistan and Delhi. In the previous year, however, there was no controversy over the date, and Id was observed on February 15.

The village people have another name for Id-ul-Fitr, which is Semian-vali-Id, literally "Id of sweet shredded wheat". In the morning, every family cooks one or more sweet dishes. Younger relatives bring some of it to their older kin before eating any themselves. One notices people briskly walking through the village carrying bowls full of food for their relatives. Food is also given to the *kamins*, especially Muslims such as the Faqir and Sakka.

Everyone takes a bath in the morning and puts on new clothes. It is considered *sabab* (meritorious) to eat sweet food and wear new clothes on the Id day. About noon, most of the adult males and a large number of children go to the Id-gah (place of Id prayers)[6] at Daut-

6. This is the same building as that referred to earlier as *jumma masjid*. When it is used for Id prayers, it is called Id-gah.

ana, where men from the nearby villages converge. The prayer is led by Jamaluddin of Chavandi Kalan. In some villages people walk to the Id-gah in a group and have a drummer to lead the procession. But in Chavandi Kalan drums are not beaten, nor do all go together. Outside of the Id-gah many low caste Muslims gather, with bowls for alms. People give coins or grain to them, for it is meritorious to give alms to beggars on that day.

The Meo women of Chavandi Kalan also pray together on this day. However, they are not to go to the Id-gah with the men. They pray in the *pakka* mosque in the village. Since no male is allowed to pray with women and because there are no female religious practitioners, the prayer is led by a lay woman.

No farm work is done on the Id day except feeding animals. People spend the afternoon visiting friends and relatives and sharing food with them. Throughout the day the *kamins* and beggars from other villages come and are given alms. Alms of any kind may be given to all professional beggars, Hindu or Muslim. The Bhangis are the only non-beggar Hindu caste to whom the Meos give food on this day. The Faqirs, the Sakkas, and the Mirasis visit their *jajmans* to collect food and sometimes money. The Lohar does not go to his *jajmans*, but many Meos send food to his house. When the Faqirs call at a Meo household for food on this day, they are expected to say a *darud* (a Muslim prayer)[7] in the name of the ancestors of the family.

Basant Panchmi

Literally, "Basant Panchmi" means "the yellow fifth", and it falls on the fifth day of the bright (i.e., moonlit) half of the Hindu month of Magh, which marks the beginning of spring. In 1964, Basant Panchmi fell on

7. A Muslim religious ritual, usually performed by Faqirs, to send food to the dead ancestors. Powdered *loban* (a kind of resin) is poured over burning embers, and verses from the Muslim religious scriptures are read while facing Mecca. A request is made to God that the food may reach some dead person.

since diseases such as smallpox, measles, boils, eczema, etc., are prevalent in summer and since Mata-Mai controls these, an attempt is made to propitiate her.

The Meos do not celebrate Basora, although they confess: "We used to celebrate Basora before partition, but now nobody does. However, we still worship Mata-Mai for selfish reasons. When a child has smallpox, we worship the goddess because she is the only one who can protect us from this disease."

Amavas

Amavas means "no-moon day", i.e., the last day of the dark part of the moon's monthly cycle. It is observed by Hindus throughout north India. In discussing religious practices in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Planalp writes: "A general belief is that when the moon is completely dark it is in trouble or difficulty. But just as the moon recovers, so may anyone in the family who is sick or in trouble recover."[8] In Chavandi Kalan, nobody seemed to know the significance of *amavas*, but a Hindu informant said that every *amavas* was a special day. People must bathe in the morning, water the *pipal* tree, and visit a temple if there is one in the village. A sweet dish, such as rice pudding or *halva*, is cooked. Men rest, since bullocks are not to be yoked for work on this day.

Every *amavas* is not celebrated in this manner in Chavandi Kalan. On 12 April 1964, however, it was celebrated by the Hindus of the village, and ignored by the Meos. An old Meo said: "The Meos do not celebrate *amavas* now, but they used to do so just like the Hindus before 1947. They used to water the *pipal* tree, cook a sweet dish, and abstain from work. Food was given to the local Faqir in the name of the ancestors. The Faqir offered *darud* for the ancestors."

There is one *amavas*, however, which is still celebrated by all the castes including the Meos in Chavandi Kalan.

8. Jack Planalp, *Religious Life and Values in a North Indian Village*, doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Cornell University, Ithaca. N.Y., 1956, p. 379.

It is the *amavas* in the month of Kvar (September-October), which is locally called Manani Amavas or Kanagati Amavas. Its celebration shall be described later in this chapter.

Id-ul-Zuha

This is one of the most important Islamic festivals and is celebrated by the Meos, like the Muslims everywhere, on the tenth day of the last month of the Muslim calendar. Muslims refer to it as the Great Festival or Sacrificial Feast. On this last day of hajj, pilgrims to Mecca sacrifice an animal at one of several locations within an area called Mina, particularly at Aqaba, "for it was there that Abraham prepared to sacrifice Ishmael (whom Muslim lore substitutes for the Biblical Isaac) when God sent a ram in his stead".[9]

In 1964, the Id-ul-Zuha fell on April 23. All the Muslims take a bath in the morning and put on new clothes. Sweet food is prepared by every family. Those who can afford it, cook meat, preferably goat's meat: hence, this day is commonly called Bakar-Id (goat Id). It is considered meritorious to sacrifice a goat on this day and distribute two-thirds of the meat to the *kamins* and to one's relatives. In Chavandi Kalan, one family sacrificed a goat which had been set aside for this purpose several months earlier and fattened with special care. Jamaluddin and his father were called to slaughter the animal according to the proper Muslim method. About one-third of the meat was kept by the family, and the rest was given away.

The midday prayers, in which about twenty men from Chavandi Kalan took part, were held in the Id-gah at Dautana. Women gathered in the *pakka* mosque of the village and offered the Id prayers. Approximately five hundred people from about fifteen villages assembled at Dautana. The *hafiz* of Chavandi Kalan was the leader of the ceremonies. He was seated on a wooden bench facing the congregation. First he read some paragraphs from the

9. Von Grunebaum, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

Muslim holy book, the *Hadith* (The Traditions), while a man held an umbrella over his head to protect him from the sun and to honour his position, then everyone offered prayers, and a collection was taken for the *hafiz*. He later told me that he received 150 rupees from this collection and a suit of clothes, which was donated by a well-to-do family.

Before the ceremonies began in the Id-gah, there was a great deal of disorder: everyone was talking despite appeals from the *hafiz* to be quiet. A prominent Meo stood up and started scolding the people, using insulting remarks such as "illiterate brutes" and "bad Muslims". Several men from the audience shouted protests and asked the leader to sit down.

After the prayers, another man stood up and started lecturing. He reminded the congregation that since the harvesting was now over they should devote some time to religious activities. He advised them to form small groups and participate in *tabligue* (missionary) work. He reminded the gathering that several people had promised to do religious work after the harvest and said that the time had come to carry out their obligation. One man from the audience stood up and said to the speaker: "You had better remember the promise you made to give your daughter to my son. I hope you will also fulfil your promise." It was felt that this remark was too much of an insult and should not have been uttered in the mosque. People started dispersing with the remarks: "Meos are really wild. They have no manners. They even lack respect for religion."

No farm work is done on the Id day. People visit their relatives and share food with them. Beggars from far and near come in the afternoon and are given food. The *kamins* —only Muslims and the Bhangis—collect food from their *jajmans*. A fixed amount of grain, about four kilograms each, is given to the Sakkas, the Faqirs, and the Mirasis by the Meos.

panying the *painks*. After a while, he fell on the ground unconscious. A few minutes later, he rose and ran towards the tomb of Hajji Pir and lay prostrated. He again lay down on ground and appeared to be very stiff. A small earthen pot with a smouldering cow-dung cake and powdered resin was placed near him. The smoke slowly calmed him, and he regained consciousness after some time. By making inquiries of an elderly villager, I discovered that this young man had been having similar experiences for several years following his return from Pakistan, where he had migrated after partition. Upon his return to Chavandi Kalan, he found that his land had already been allotted to the Punjabi refugees. His troubles with the spirits began at this time.

The *painks* again left about noon to visit some nearby villages and returned for Mehndo at about 9.00 p.m. On hearing the sound of the bells tied to the waists of the *painks*, Mehndi trays started arriving in the village square. Only five families bring Mehndi trays regularly, but anyone can. There were four of these, one having been taken to the mosque the previous night—Mehndi night. The *painks* danced in the various parts of the village, slowly moving towards the *pakka* mosque. The bearers of the Mehndi trays accompanied them. Large numbers of people participated in the procession, which reached the mosque at about 2.00 a.m. Here the *painks* danced for a while and then stopped to rest. They were given the sweet drinks and the food from the Mehndi trays. The little earthen lamps were put in niches in the walls of the mosque. Thereafter everybody returned home, carrying the trays still containing the henna, which is later washed off.

The *painks* again danced on May 22, the ninth day of Muharram. They went round the village and collected money from every house—one-half of a rupee for the *tajia* expenses and an additional amount for other celebrations.

On the tenth day of Muharram (May 23) a fair was organized at Dautana. A *tajia* made of bamboo and coloured paper was brought to the fair. Seven villages contributed towards the cost of the *tajia*. The structure, supposed to be a replica of the tomb of Husain, is about

six metres tall and has markings symbolizing the tomb of his brother, Hasan. Bamboo poles are extended on both sides so that men can carry it on shoulders. In front of the *tajia* a *nagara* is placed, which is beaten by both Hindus and Muslims all day long. The Sakkas provide drinking water in front of the structure. Some people pay the Sakkas to sprinkle water in front of the *tajia* on their behalf—an act which is considered meritorious. This symbolizes the scarcity of water suffered by Husain and his companions in the battle of Karbala. Some people make offerings of cooked food to an attendant, who is usually a mullah. An old Bania of Chavandi Kalan told me: "In the old days we also used to participate in Muharram. We used to give sweet rice to the *tajia* attendant as the Meos do. But now that the Meos are becoming Islamized and are abandoning the Hindu festivals, we have stopped making offerings to the *tajia*."

Several hundred people, mostly Meos, attend the fair: men, women, and children wearing their finest, and in a gay mood. The Meos cook a sweet dish on this day. Scores of stalls come up, at which food, trinkets, and toys are sold. At about 4.00 p.m. the *tajia* is moved, a few metres at a time, towards the pond near the Id-gah, where it should reach by sunset. There it is broken up and immersed in the pond. As the *tajia* moves away from the fairground, entertainment activities such as wrestling matches are conducted.

On the thirteenth day of Muharram (25 May 1964) a Tija (third day) feast was held in Chavandi Kalan. The *painks* had collected about 175 rupees and spent a major part of it on the feast. *Pulao* (a kind of fried-rice) was cooked in the open in front of the school and was distributed about noon among those who had assembled there. The entire community was invited, but only the Muslims responded. The Hindus did not partake of *pulao* because it was cooked by a Muslim, and it was made with buffalo meat.

On 1 July 1964, fairs were held at several places in Mewat in honour of the Chaliha of Husain (the fortieth day after the anniversary of Husain's death). No one from

Muharram

Muharram is the name of the first month of the Islamic calendar. In 1964, the celebrations began in Chavandi Kalan on the fifth day of this month (May 18), although they might have begun as early as the first day of the month. Muslims of the Shia sect, who believe that Husain, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was the rightful heir to the caliphate, mourn his death, which occurred on the tenth of Muharram in the Muslim year 46 Hijri (A.D. 680) in the battle of Karbala. His brother, Hasan, who the Shias believe was poisoned, is also remembered on this occasion. By and large, the Sunni sect in India and Pakistan does not participate in mourning during Muharram, or at least this is the widespread belief. The Meos seem to be an exception to this for even though they are Sunnis they celebrate Muharram. However, in the Meo celebrations there is no mourning. In fact, contrary to the usual character of this Shia ceremony, there is a complete lack of sense of involvement with the sad occurrences at Karbala. A non-Meo religious practitioner of Mewat told me: "These Meos claim to be Sunni Muslims. They should not celebrate Muharram. Actually, they do not mourn at all. To them this is another festival and an excuse to cook rice pudding. These Meos are animals."

At the beginning of the Muharram celebrations in Chavandi Kalan, Meo families cook a sweet dish. Young men dress as *painks* and go on a round of the nearby villages. In 1964, there were four Meos and one Sakka in this contingent. Their special uniform, which is worn over ordinary clothes, consists of a red *lungi* (a garment worn around the waist), a green *alfi* (a rectangular piece of cloth with a slot in the middle to go over the head), a red-and-white *ganda* (a rope made with coloured rags and worn over the turban, across the chest, and back and around the waist), a leather or fibre belt with small bells, and a sword or a stick. The *painks* are forbidden to wear shoes. Also, they must not sleep on cots or ride on wheeled vehicles.

About noon on this day the *painks* gather in the village square. A young Dakot Brahman, who is in charge of

them, ties a piece of *dori* (red thread used for ritual purposes by Hindus) on their wrists and leads them in singing *maurasia.* A *nagara* (large drum) is placed in the middle of the square and is beaten by two men at a time. The *painks* skip and dance in unison for about an hour. After this they rest and then leave on their tour of the villages.

In each village they visit, they first dance in the square, then go from house to house, dancing and collecting money. The funds raised are spent on some common project of a religious nature, such as the repair of the *nagara.* At night the *painks* rest in some village, sleeping only on the floor. Early next morning they continue their tour covering five or six villages during the day. They return to their village on the night of the seventh day of Muharram. Any adult male may become a *paink.* Most Meo men of Chavandi Kalan have been a *paink* one or more times in their youth. Hindu and Sikh boys may also play *paink.* In recent years, one Sikh boy and one Hindu Nai boy of the village have acted as soldiers of Husain. Bereaved parents usually promise to make their surviving sons *painks* in the hope that this might save their lives.

In the evening of the seventh day several families celebrate Mehndi (literally, henna) in the village square to welcome the *painks* back. They make a brass tray with ten or twelve earthen lamps, a potful of a sweet drink, a cup of sweet pudding, and powdered henna. In 1964, the night was stormy, and the villagers waited until midnight, but the *painks* did not return. Such delay is rare; but when it does occur, the ceremony is held the following night, which is called Mehndo.

The *painks* returned to the village in the morning of May 21, i.e., the eighth day of Muharram. After resting for a while, they started dancing in the village square. While dancing was in progress a young Meo had suddenly became possessed by the spirit of Hasan. He started chiding the *painks* for their failure to return the previous night for Mehndi, for riding on a bullock cart during part of their tour, and for being disobedient to Husain. He had also scolded a Faqir for his failure in his duty of accom-

used to water the *pipal* near the main well on Manani Amavas. So much of water was used that it flowed down the road."

The Meo mullah of Chavandi Kalan explained to me how the Meos were persuaded not to water the *pipal* on every *amavas:* "The Meos used to water the *pipal* on *amavas*. The local Faqir mullah disliked the practice and once got so angry that he warned the village leaders that he would leave the village if they did not stop the tree worship. The leaders agreed to discontinue it. Since then the Meos have not watered the *pipal*."

Another Meo gave a slightly different account of how the Meos had formerly celebrated the *amavas*. He said: "On *amavas*, the Meos used to cook rice pudding, and they used to put a piece of *roti* and some pudding on the doorsill, together with some water in a pot. This was believed to be for the ancestors. Now, many people do not even cook rice pudding on this day."

Chhat

In the hills to the east of Chavandi Kalan there is a spot believed to be visited by *piplasan* (the king of snakes) every year on the fifth moonlit night of the month of Bhadon. The devotees, who are mostly Chamars, stay up that night, assemble at the spot, and sing songs in praise of *piplasan*. Milk and rice pudding are left in earthen saucers which the king of snakes is believed to come and consume. No one is supposed to try to see *piplasan* while he is doing this; hence, nobody has actually seen him.

The following morning, which is the Chhat (sixth day), a fair is held near the seat of *piplasan*. This fell on September 12 in 1964. Meos, as well as Hindus, attend the fair and make offerings of food and flowers to the king of snakes. Although most of the Meo men I talked to did not admit of having worshipped a snake, they were convinced that *piplasan* existed and that some people had seen him. One Meo woman claimed to have actually seen the big snake. A Meo told me: "*Piplasan* is true. People have seen him. His devotees can cure snakebite. By invoking *piplasan* and by tying a piece of black thread near the snake-

bite, these practitioners cure the victim. If the patient doubts *piplasan* and uses medicine, he is sure to die." Many Meos confided to me that they dared not deny the existence of the big snake because, if one did so, snakes appeared in one's house.

Divali

Divali literally means "festival of lights". Tiny earthen lamps and candles are lit by the hundreds in Hindu homes on Divali night. The festival falls on the *amavas* in the month of Kartik and marks the return of Rama, the hero of the popular Hindu epic, the *Ramayana,* from fourteen years of exile. In Chavandi Kalan, the Hindus observed Divali on November 4 in 1964, but the Meos did not. A Meo told me: "We do not any more celebrate Divali. However, we cook rice pudding and *malida* [a sweet dish made from wheat flour, sugar, and clarified butter] on Govardhan — the next day after Divali."

In some parts of Mewat, Divali is still popular. An educated Meo from Lachhmangarh *tehsil* told me: "I was away in Ajmer, but I came home for Divali. This is the custom in our family. My sister's husband also comes to our place on Divali. He is a mullah-type, but still he comes. We dust and clean the house and plaster the floors and walls. We decorate the house by drawing coloured borders around doors and windows. On Divali day the cowherds come home early. The cows are rubbed clean and *seli* [cotton thread] is tied to their necks. Vermilion is prepared in a small pot, and with a piece of cloth we make round marks on the animals' bodies. Mother cooks rice and offers rice, sugar, and clarified butter to the Sayyads of the village. We buy lots of sweets, puffed grain, and *batasha* [a kind of sugar candy]. In the evening, we worship the goddess Lakshmi. We put a lighted lamp and some milk on a tray and place it in front of the picture of Lakshmi. Children light firecrackers. The women in our family still do this, but the men do not care much nowadays." He added: "My grandmother, who died only six years ago, used to worship the goddess Lakshmi on Divali night. She used to decorate the picture of Lakshmi with

Chavandi Kalan visited any of the fairs, but most families cooked a sweet dish on that day.

Halsotia

This is a festival for bullocks. In the month of Savan (July-August), when the first heavy rainfall comes, bullocks are given a holiday. They are washed in the morning and are fed with *gurvani* (sweet porridge). The members of the family are given porridge only after the bullocks have been fed. Small bells are hung around the bullocks' necks, and sometimes their bodies are decorated with patterns drawn in various colours. Some of the *gurvani* is later distributed among the *kamins*. According to a Meo informant: "Almost all the Meos celebrate Halsotia. Other castes also celebrate it. Of course, one has to have bullocks to celebrate Halsotia."

Tij

The festival of Tij is celebrated on the third day of Savan-sudi (the moonlit half of the month), which in 1964 fell on August 10. A Meo woman of Chavandi Kalan told me: "This is a festival of *kanyas* [girls]. We will cook *pue* [pancakes] for our daughters today." But the mullah commented: "Today is the Hindus' Tij. Women are singing in Totaram's house." These two statements indicate the Meos' ambivalence about this festival, which, according to most of the older villagers, was celebrated by the Meos before 1947. In fact, most Meos admit that they observe the festival even now, in a half-hearted manner though.

Most Meos in Chavandi Kalan cook rice pudding and pancakes on the morning of Tij. Meo women still show a great interest in Tij, whereas men hesitate to talk about it. The convention used to be for girls, both daughters and brides of the village, to put up swings on trees and spend the better part of the day swinging and singing. The weather, which is very cool and pleasant at this time of the year, makes Tij enjoyable.

The Hindu families of the village, especially the Banias, Brahmans, and Khatis, celebrate Tij more gayly than

the Meos. Most families cook sweet food. Women put on new clothes, and married daughters and daughters-in-law receive gifts of new garments from their fathers and fathers-in-law respectively. Several women visit the Hindu temple in a nearby village in the afternoon. In the evening they form groups and sing songs in chorus. Elsewhere in north India, married women and unmarried pubescent girls fast and pray on this day for the health and long life of their husbands.[10]

Rakhi

The Rakhi festival fell on 23 August 1964, which coincided with the *purnamashi* (full-moon day) of the month of Bhadon. Rakhi is a short form of Rakshabandhan, which literally means "bond of protection". It is believed that, by accepting a charm from a person, one is agreeing to protect the latter when need arises. On this day, sisters tie charms on the wrists of their brothers; Brahman priests and the *kamins* do the same for their *jajmans*. This act is symbolic of strengthening the bonds between the parties concerned. In Chavandi Kalan, all the Hindus and Sikhs celebrate Rakhi, but the Meos do not actively participate in its celebration. However, when the Hindu *kamins* tie charms on their wrists, the Meos allow it and give them gifts of money and grain.

Manani Amavas

The *amavas* in the Hindu month of Kvar is called Manani Amavas or Kanagati Amavas in Chavandi Kalan. As has been stated earlier in this chapter, the Meos used to celebrate every *amavas*, but now they celebrate only the Manani Amavas. On this occasion, which in 1964 fell on October 5, the Meos and other castes in Chavandi Kalan cooked rice pudding or some other sweet dish. No one yoked the bullocks on that day. Before 1947, the Meos used to water the *pipal* tree, but now they have discontinued the practice. A Meo of about forty years of age told me: "When I was a boy, I remember, Meos and Hindus

10. Planalp, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

Chapter 10

LIFE CYCLE RITES

BIRTH CEREMONIES

CHILDBIRTH is a period of considerable anxiety for the Meos. A young Meo told me: "When a child is born, the life of the mother is in danger. I have seen many women die in childbirth. To insure the safety of the mother and the baby, we tie a sword or a rake under the head of the bed. We also hang a large bean on the wall or from the ceiling." The concern for the safety of the woman is great in view of her economic importance and the high bride-price.

Women continue to perform their daily chores during pregnancy. As soon as labour pains begin, the village midwife is sent for, and an experienced female relative is asked to assist her. In Chavandi Kalan, the assistance is particularly necessary because the midwife is very old and nearly blind. The umbilical chord is tied in two places with a string and is cut in the middle with a sickle. The placenta is buried in a corner of the room, and the chord, after it has dried and fallen off of the child, is hidden in the ceiling. If a male baby is born, the midwife and the woman assisting her sing a conventional song, which has the refrain "*Simar sahib ko nam, Sultani, tere put huo*" ("Remember the name of God, oh Sultani [mother's name], [since] you bore a son"). Some neighbouring women may also join in the singing. The midwife is given one extra rupee for delivering a male baby. On the second day following the birth and every day thereafter for three, five, seven, or twenty-one days, the family invites the village women to sing songs in the late afternoon, and every day sweet food is distributed among the participants.

On the third day, the baby and the mother are given a warm water bath, and the mother washes her hair and changes her clothes. All the earthenware utensils, such as the pitchers, that were in the delivery room are dis-

carded and replaced by new ones. The floor and the walls of the room are cleaned and plastered with a mixture of mud and cow-dung. All these cleansing operations are necessary since childbirth is considered defiling because of the bodily discharges of the mother and also because of her contact with a low-caste midwife. Both the mother and the baby are again given a bath on the fourth day. They must, however, remain inside of the room until an auspicious day, such as a Friday, following the third-day bath. When they first come out of the room, the baby is shown the stars—a custom which is probably due to the importance of a knowledge of the celestial bodies in Muslim tradition.

If the child is the first son, the mother's parents are informed of the birth. The father himself is expected to personally convey the news to his wife's parents and give them a lump of brown sugar, but he may be represented by a cousin of his or even by a Nai or a Mirasi. Messages are also sent to the child's father's sisters, each of whom is expected to bring a *kurta-topi* (shirt and cap) for the baby. The mother's parents give a rupee to the person that brings the message, and they inform him of the date when they expect to bring the *chhuchhak* (gift to a daughter at the birth of her first son), which is usually presented within ten days of delivery. The *chhuchhak* normally consists of the following items:

For the baby:

(1) *bankra*—silver anklets of a special type
(2) *murki*—gold earrings
(3) *kurta-topi*—shirt and cap

For the relatives of the baby:

(1) three articles of clothing and one rupee each for the mother, the father, the father's mother; sometimes also for the father's brothers and their wives and for the father's sisters
(2) a turban and one rupee for the father's father

flowers and spices and offer *arti* [the ceremonial moving of a flame in front of a god's image] with a tray containing a lamp, silver coins, and other ceremonial material on it. We boys used to make fun of her by saying that money would not come to her in that way. But she would carry on, insisting that this was the way of the elders."

Shabrat

"Shabrat", which is a corrupt form of the Arabic phrase "Shab-e-Barat", is an important Muslim festival that falls on the fourteenth day of the eighth month of the Muslim calendar. Jaffur Shurreef explains the significance of this festival thus:

> The word burat, agreeably to the interpretation in the *Qoran* and dictionaries, signifies a register. It is the book of record, in which are registered annually all the actions of men, which they are to perform during the ensuing year; and it is said to be on the fifteenth night of this month, that the true and holy God annually records them in the book. Owing to this circumstance, the feast in commemoration of the event has obtained the name of *Shub-e-Burat*, or the night of the record.[11]

Shabrat was celebrated throughout Mewat on 19 December 1964. Women clean and plaster houses two or three days beforehand. On Shabrat afternoon water is brought from the well in a new pitcher and is used in cooking various kinds of *halva* and ordinary food. In the late afternoon at least one Faqir calls at every Meo house. He is given food enough for a meal. Before taking it away, he performs *darud* over it, mentioning the names of particular ancestors. For *mamushah* (relatives who have died childless), a slightly different procedure is followed. Food is set aside in their name and is covered with a hand fan. Later on it is fed to an unmarried male member of the family. It is believed that the food reaches the soul of the

11. Jaffur Shurreef, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India*, London, Parbury, Allen and Co., 1832, pp. 251-252.

ancestor. People try to cook the favourite dish of the ancestor.

After the ancestors have been provided for, the family members are fed. Some *halva* is sent to the close kin in the village. Men visit their relatives and share *halva* with them. Wherever they go, they find women awaiting them with a large container full of *halva*. They sit down with the family members and eat a little at each place. I accompanied a young Meo on a round of his relatives' homes on Shabrat. We visited and ate at eight houses. People deem it necessary to receive all their close relatives on this day. If any do not turn up, they are sent for; if, for some reason, they fail to come, *halva* is sent to them.

It is clear that the Meos of Chavandi Kalan celebrate both Hindu and Muslim festivals, but it is also evident that they are losing interest in those connected with Hinduism. They have completely abandoned some of the Hindu festivals they used to celebrate in the past. Those festivals that they still celebrate are by no means given the same amount of attention as that given to them by the Hindus. Some of the rituals associated with the observances are now neglected. It is also noticeable that the Meos who participate in Hindu festivals are criticized by their more Islamized caste fellows. On the other hand, the Islamic calendrical rites are carried out much more meticulously by the Meos. Even the Shia festival of Muharram, with which the Meos are not expected to concern themselves, is celebrated by the Meos in great earnest only because it happens to be Islamic.

after birth or it can be delayed for months, at the convenience of the family.

MUSALMANI OR CIRCUMCISION

Male circumcision is an exclusively Islamic custom in Mewat; hence it is called Musalmani (making a person Muslim). This is one of the most important Muslim customs which the Meos had adopted at the time of their conversion to Islam and which they have scrupulously practised ever since. Every Meo male must be circumcised either in his infancy or at any time before he is fifteen years old. The operation is performed by a Muslim Nai with a razor blade. Since there are very few Nais in Mewat, they have each to serve a large number of villages. The Meos of Chavandi Kalan are served by a Nai of Gvalda village, which is about thirty kilometres away.

The boy's father's sisters and his father's father's sisters are invited several days before the circumcision. They clean and plaster the house and process the raw foodstuff for the ensuing feast. Usually one day before circumcision the boy's mother's brother brings *bhat* (literally, cooked rice; gifts). The boy's father stands outside of the house with a brass tray in hand, and his mother stands in the doorway with a new pitcher on her head. Women sing special songs known as *amrela*. The mother's brother puts money in the brass tray and the pitcher. He also gives some money to each of the boy's father's brothers and to his father's father and the latter's brothers. Sometimes all the adult males in the village are given a rupee each. The mother's brother then enters the house and is offered sweet food.

About noon on the day of circumcision a sumptuous feast is given to relatives and friends. Following the feast, the boy's body is anointed with a yellowish paste made from turmeric and oil, called *batna,* which is applied by his aunts, both paternal and maternal. Then the boy is given a bath. His mother's brother gives him some money. All the while women sing *batna* songs. The boy is then carried inside of the house by his mother's brother. He is dressed in new clothes, his brother's wife

puts *surma* (a blackening substance) in his eyes, his sisters and father's sisters tie *sehra* (a kind of crown with strands of flowers hanging in front) on his head, when each one of these women is given gifts of money. The Nai is given new white clothes to wear for the ceremony. The father distributes money among his *kamins*.

The boy is taken round the village to offer *salam* (Muslim greeting) first to the village mosque, then to the public meeting place, then to his mother, and finally to the relatives. Each relative acknowledges the *salam* by giving him a rupee. The boy returns home, his *sehra* is removed, and he is seated on an overturned basket covered with cloth. He spreads his legs and puts his hands under them. Women sing songs urging the Nai to exercise caution. The boy is asked to repeat the *kalma* (confession of the Islamic faith). The Nai holds the foreskin between two pieces of bamboo and cuts it with a razor. After the incision is made, he applies an antiseptic powder made of seven herbs. The boy is then asked to lie down on a cot and is fed a mixture of clarified butter and sugar, which is believed to help the wound heal in about ten days. For a week or two the Nai visits the boy periodically to check the progress of healing. The Nai is rewarded with five to fifty-two rupees, and often some grain in addition. The Faqirs are the only caste from which the Nai expects no payment for circumcision.

It is evident that many of the rituals at circumcision are similar to those performed at the Meo marriage ceremony, which is predominantly Hindu. This practice of borrowing certain elements of the marriage ritual is common among both Hindus and Meos, and it reflects the wish that the boy may live long enough to marry, since this is one of the most important events in a man's life. The participation of relatives in the circumcision rituals is specifically neither Hindu nor Muslim. It serves, rather, to emphasize family solidarity and also, perhaps, is a way to deflect the boy's attention from the pain and discomfort that he suffers at the time.

For non-relatives :

(1) one rupee each to all the assembled guests at the time of the presentation of *chhuchhak*
(2) one rupee each to all the *kamins* of the family

Usually, the *chhuchhak* is brought by the mother's father and some of his cousins. They stay with the son-in-law's family for three days where they get honoured treatment. In recent years, the custom of *chhuchhak* has become less popular. Since a Meo does not hesitate to accept hospitality from his daughter's husband's family, he often arrives with a large party. Sometimes it costs more to feed the guests than the worth of *chhuchhak*.

Chhatiko

"Chhatiko" literally means "the sixth day", which refers to a ceremony that usually takes place on the sixth day after the birth of a son; but it may be held on any day between the sixth and the thirteenth day. A Meo informant told me: "In the old days we used to call a Brahman priest for Chhatiko. He performs *havan* and suggests a name for the baby after consulting the religious books. He also prepares the child's horoscope. But we do not call the priest any more. Few people have Chhatiko anyway nowadays, and those who do have merely a feast at which sweet rice is served. Relatives are invited. The child is not given a name on this occasion. The child's parents, uncles, aunts, or other relatives may choose him a name in an informal way. We often wait for several weeks before giving the child a name."

Although an informal choice of name is now the usual practice in Chavandi Kalan, some Meo families still consult a Brahman priest for this purpose. A young Meo father, whose five-month-old son had no name as yet, told me that his family always consulted a Jaga (a Brahman caste of genealogists) before giving a name to a male child. There are some Meo families in the village which consult the local Kherapati Brahman for a name for their sons. In any case, people avoid giving a name for some time. A Meo explained to me that this was due to the

fact of high infant mortality rate, and that the loss of a nameless child appeared to be not so great as the loss of one who had a name.

At the time of Chhatiko it is customary for the baby's father's married sisters and his father's father's married sisters to present him with a shirt and a cap. This is done even if the family does not hold any formal ceremonies. Since it is important for married women to maintain good relations with their parents, this practice is continued to strengthen the bonds. The child's parents reciprocate with their own presents.

Kua-pujna

"Kua-pujna" literally means "worshipping the well". Some time between the tenth and the fifteenth day after the birth of a son, the child and the mother are dressed in new clothes given by the child's maternal grandparents and are taken to a well for worship. Women sing in chorus as they go to the well. Some hire a drummer to accompany the procession. A *tilak* (a mark made for ritual purposes) is put on the baby's forehead and on the side of the well. A swastika is drawn on the wall of the well with the same material, which on this occasion is red ochre. A new pitcher is filled with water and is taken home. Again, on the way home the women sing in chorus, and the drummer beats the drum. Brown sugar is distributed among the women that participate in the ceremonies.

Very few Meos observe this custom now, but I learned that in some parts of Mewat, especially Bharatpur, it is still popular.

Akika

Many Meos have abandoned both Chhatiko and *chhuchhak* and have substituted them by a Muslim custom called Akika. This rite is essentially the sacrifice of goats. Usually two goats, each less than one year old and having at least two teeth, are slaughtered with the help of a Faqir according to *halali* (Muslim slaughtering technique). The meat is cooked and served at a feast given to relatives and friends. This rite can be held on the sixth day

SAGAI OR BETROTHAL

When a Meo girl reaches the age of eight or ten, her parents start looking for a suitable husband for her. The relatives are asked to help in the search. When a promising suggestion is made, a relative, usually the girl's older brother or her father's brother, is sent to the boy's village to inquire about the boy and his family. This emissary talks to the boy without disclosing his purpose and finds out about the family's financial and social standing through the villagers. After he reports his findings to the girl's father and the father's brothers, further efforts depend upon the opinion of the male members of the family.

In the old days, the search was made by a Nai or a Mirasi, who, in most cases, had the authority to confirm a betrothal if he was satisfied with the match. But now nobody cares to entrust this responsibility to a *kamin*, for he can be easily bribed

Although the members of the girl's family appear to take the initiative in finding a suitable match, in practice they do not have to do so. Since the value of women is high, the boy's parents indirectly approach the girl's parents to arrange the betrothal. There is, however, no conventional way for the boy's parents to follow. They make a suggestion through a relative and then wait for the girl's parents to start the negotiations. I noticed in a number of cases in Chavandi Kalan that the boy's parents were the ones who were most anxious and that, if the girl's parents were slow in responding, reminders were sent to them through a relative.

If the preliminary inquiries are encouraging, the girl's father, a brother, and her father's brother—in most cases accompanied by a Nai—pay another visit to the boy's village. They meet the boy and talk to the villagers to find out about the family's reputation. If they are agreeable for the match, they send a message to the boy's family to "cook rice" for the guests, an act which signifies approval. The boy's father invites the guests to partake of the rice in the evening. The guests are served rice with sugar and clarified butter. Before they

start eating they ask for the boy. The boy eats a morsel from the tray of the eldest member of the party, who gives him a rupee. The boy's father and the family's Nai are also given one rupee each. This marks the formal confirmation of Sagai. After the guests have finished eating rice, prominent villagers are invited to dinner for the purpose of having them witness the settlement. This is important since the agreement is verbal. Later on, while attesting the betrothal, a person would say, "Yes, I ate rice at so-and-so's Sagai."

BIAH OR MARRIAGE

Most of the marriages follow within a year of the Sagai. In view of the value of women, the boy's parents try to celebrate the marriage as early as they can lest the girl's parents change their minds if they receive a better offer of bride-price. About two months before the marriage season, which begins in the month of Baisakh (March-April), the boy's parents begin sending messages to the girl's parents urging them to hold the wedding that year. If the girl's parents are favourably inclined, they confirm it about the middle of February through their Nai.

Lagan

The real marriage cycle begins, however, in the month of Chait when a formal communication of the wedding date is sent. This communication and the ceremonies associated with it are together referred to as Lagan. About one month before the wedding, the girl's parents send their Nai or Kherapati Brahman to the boy's parents with a letter stating the date of the wedding and the number of guests they expect the boy's father to bring. A written note for the Lagan is a recent development. Earlier, the communication consisted of a piece of cotton thread with a certain number of knots in it: one for God, one for Mother Earth, and the rest for the date of the wedding. For example, if the wedding is to be held on Baisakh 11, there would be thirteen knots. A letter received by a groom's father in Chavandi Kalan in 1964 read as follows: "The date of the wedding is Bai-

sakh 17. Do not bring more than five guests. Bring the jewellery. Do not bring any dancers or musicians. Times are bad. If you bring too many people, it might become a cause for serious ill feelings. Greetings from all of us to the people of Chavandi Kalan."

On the arrival of the Nai or the Kherapati Brahman with the Lagan, the boy's father informs his close friends and relatives and invites them for a meal at his house. The Lagan is formally presented to the oldest member of the assembled group who reads it out. In case he is illiterate, he hands it over to the Kherapati or some other person in the group to read it out for him. The relatives and friends offer comments on the Lagan, and then the reply is drafted. The date of the wedding is never questioned, but the suggestions regarding the size of the marriage party, the amount of jewellery, and the musicians may be disputed and alternative suggestions made. The reply is handed over to the messenger. The assembled guests are feasted. Women sing songs abusing the messenger and pointing out the lapses of his *jajman*. This is customary, and the messenger is not to take offence. The women are later given some *bakhali* (boiled gram).

If the messenger is a Hindu, which is often the case, he is given raw provisions with which he is to prepare his meal, since he will not accept food cooked by Muslims. Some of the Hindu guests may also eat with him. Occasionally, a Brahman woman is asked to cook for the Hindu guests. The messenger is given a present which can vary from one to fifty-one rupees. He leaves the village the following morning.

Following Lagan, the boy's father visits his own father-in-law to inform him of the date of the wedding and to give him a lump of brown sugar. The sugar signifies confirmation of the wedding and an expression of happiness.

Chak Nautna

About a week after Lagan, a ceremony called Chak Nautna (inviting the potter's wheel) is held. The boy's

mother and the girl's mother go to the potter's house in their respective villages with some women to perform the ceremony. In Chavandi Kalan, as there is no potter they go to the one in Dautana. The women draw a swastika on the potter's wheel and worship it. They give gifts of grain, sugar, and money to the potter's wife. The potter is informed of the date of the wedding and of their requirements of pots for the marriage. The women return, carrying a few earthenware pots as a gift from the potter.

Inviting the Sahvasani

The term *sahvasani* literally means "female companion", and it refers to the groom's or bride's, special companion who is usually an older sister or father's sister. There can be several *sahvasanis*. The married sisters and the father's sisters are invited about two weeks before the wedding. They are assigned various responsibilities such as cleaning and decorating the house, grinding grain, making storage bins for grain, organizing and participating in various rituals, and cooking for the family and the guests. The need for the *sahvasani* is of great importance in performing the various chores in connection with the marriage ceremonies.

Ban Nautna

Ban Nautna is the custom of inviting the prospective groom or bride to a special dinner. To use the groom's case as an example, from about ten days before the wedding he is to be invited for supper every evening by the relatives and friends of his family. His mother is the first to extend a formal invitation. Boiled rice with sugar and clarified butter is fed to the groom and to his companion, who is usually a younger brother or a nephew. Actually, any food can be served, but it should not contain oil or anything sour. Late in the evening the family which feeds the groom also cooks five to ten kilograms of black gram for distribution among the women who gather every evening at the groom's house to sing wedding songs. These women first go to the family which

is contributing the gram, sing songs for a while, and then go to the groom's house with the *sahvasani* carrying on her head the basket containing the boiled gram. They sing five songs for Allah (God) and then songs about marriage which continue until the early hours of the following morning. Before they disperse, the black gram is distributed among them.

Tel

A week before the wedding day, the bride's family sends a sort of confirmatory reminder to the groom's family through a Nai or a Kherapati Brahman. No verbal message need be sent: the messenger delivers a small earthenware pot containing *tel* (mustard seed oil), turmeric, and a two-paisa coin. This implies that the bride's family does not anticipate any change in the plans for the wedding. The groom's father notifies his close relatives in the village of the receipt of this confirmation. The emissary, who is usually a Hindu, is given provisions to cook his supper. Several women of the village come to the groom's house in the evening and sing songs appropriate to the occasion, which include those that abuse the messenger and his *jajman*. The following morning the messenger is given a parting gift of eleven rupees and is asked to convey the family's greetings to the bride's family. In case the boy's family has any special message, that also is communicated orally through this person.

Pendi-ka-Neg

Four days before the wedding, a ritual called Pendi-ka-Neg (the giving of candy) is performed by both the bride's and the groom's families. The mother, with the help of the *sahvasani*, cooks *laddu* (a ball-shaped candy) with rice and wheat flour, brown sugar, and ghee. One *laddu* is given to each family in the village which is closely related to the person to be married. Some extra ghee is added to the *laddus* which are set aside for the bride (or groom).

Batna and Banvara

Two days before the wedding, an oil bath ceremony, known as Batna, is held for both the groom and the bride. At about noon, seven women—four married and three unmarried (usually sisters and brothers' wives)—are invited to perform several rituals which closely follow one another. The women grind about five kilograms of grain into flour, which is distributed equally among them. Each one is also given five paise. The *sahvasani* ties a piece of yellow thread on the wrist of each of the seven women. The family cooks large quantities of *saval* (fried salt biscuits) and boiled gram mixed with brown sugar, and this is distributed among the relatives in the village.

The Batna ceremony takes place in the evening. To use the groom's ceremony as an example, the boy squats on a piece of wooden plank, and a brass plate containing mustard oil, powdered turmeric, and a pot full of water is placed at his feet. Each of the seven women puts oil and turmeric on the groom's feet, knees, shoulders, and forehead seven times with the thumbs and two fingers of both the hands. Each woman sprinkles water from the pot in the four directions of the groom and puts a two-paisa coin in the pot. The assembled women sing songs as the chosen seven apply oil and turmeric to the groom's body. After all the seven have completed the rituals, an elder brother's wife massages the groom's body with oil from the brass plate. Then the seven women bathe him and wipe his body dry with a towel. While the groom is being bathed, the women tease and pinch him—a treatment he is to bear in good spirit. After the bath he is taken inside of the house and is dressed in new clothes.

An elder brother's wife ties a *sehra* on the groom's head. (This, however, is not done for the bride.) Two unmarried girls and two married women hold the corners of a square piece of red cloth over him. Each of the four women is rewarded with eight *savals*. The *sahvasani* brings a tray full of sugar, of which the groom gives two fistfuls each to two of his elder brothers' wives. One of

them performs *arti* with a brass tray containing a lighted lamp, one and a half rupees, some rice, and an earthen pot full of water. The assembled women sing in chorus, while the one performing *arti* circles the tray round the groom's face.

The groom is conducted to the village square twice by the women for a ceremony called Banvara. The groom, dressed in his wedding regalia, and the *sahvasani* walk at the head of the procession, the latter holding a brass *arti* tray with both hands. On reaching the square, the women perform *varna*, a ceremony in which money is first circled above the groom's head, then placed on the brass tray carried by the *sahvasani*, and later given away as alms. *Arti* is performed by the *sahvasani* while the women sing songs extolling the merits of the groom and praying for long life for the future couple. The procession returns to the groom's house where *arti* is again performed and the groom is given something to eat. Then the second Banvara to the village square is performed, with the same steps. Upon the conclusion of the second Banvara, the groom is taken inside of the house, his *sehra* is taken off, henna paste is put on his hands and feet, and he is allowed to retire for the night. On the following day, he is served only sweet foods and is not allowed to go far from the village.

Mandho

Mandho is one of the many rituals which are to be performed in the villages of both the groom and the bride one day before the wedding. It is the first and the most important one of the day. A large quantity of rice is cooked, and a representative of every family of the close relatives in the village is invited and is fed at the house of the groom or the bride. Those relatives who give *nota* (a contribution of money towards the marriage expenses) receive five dishfuls of rice to take home. The female members of these households are given eight *savals* and two cupfuls of boiled gram per adult and half of this amount for every female child. This food is not to be eaten by married males.

A Bania sits in the *bangla* of the groom's family with a notebook to record the contributions. Each person pays about twice as much as the groom's family had contributed at a marriage in his own family; the idea is that he returns the amount received and contributes an equal amount as a gift (which is expected to be returned to him on the occasion of a future marriage in his family). In Chavandi Kalan, non-relatives and even people of different castes exchange *nota*. It is considered to be a kind of insurance, and its advantages are well understood. The Bania records the amount in the notebooks of both the giving and the receiving families. At the end of the day the money is handed over to the groom's father, who then rewards the Bania with Rs. 1.02 and about two and a half kilograms of grain for his services as book-keeper.

The Arrival of Bhat

In the case of a boy's marriage, his mother's brother (sometimes her father) arrives to present the *bhat* on the afternoon of the day before the groom leaves for the bride's village. For a girl's marriage, it may be presented three days later when she leaves to go to her husband's village. As soon as the mother's brother arrives with the *bhat*, he is led to a relative's *bangla*, for he is not to enter his sister's house without the necessary ceremonies. A message is sent to his sister that she make arrangements to receive the *bhat*. She awaits her brother at the entrance to her house with a pitcher on her head. A new *endhi* (balancing ring) supports the pitcher, on top of which is a small metal pot called *lota*. The pitcher has to be new, with a geometrical design in white clay and a yellow thread around its neck. The groom's or the bride's father stands beside his wife holding a brass tray containing rice and a type of grass used for religious purposes, known as *dub (Cynodon dactylon)*. Some women stand behind the couple singing *amrela* songs. The mother's brother puts some money, usually 11 to 101 rupees, and new clothes on the brass tray and some money in the pitcher. The groom's mother welcomes her

brother, with joyful tears. The latter then distributes money among the bride's or groom's paternal uncles and the family's *kamins*. After that, he enters the house and accepts hospitality.

In the evening, the potter arrives with seven sets of pitchers and some earthenware plates which are carried on the heads of as many women, who sing songs on the way. The potter is given twenty kilograms of grain, half a kilogram of oil, one kilogram of brown sugar, one and a half kilograms of rice, and one rupee. The Sakka fills the pitchers with water, and he is given five kilograms of grain and one rupee. The Khati brings a wooden stool and a wire cane, and he is given five kilograms of grain, a quarter of a kilogram of sugar, and four paise.

The groom is seated on the stool, and the Nai smears oil on his body while women surround him and sing in chorus. In the case of the bride, the Nai's wife or some female relative smears the oil. The groom is bathed, his body is dried with a towel, and he is seated on a cot. He is dressed in new clothes, and his *sehra* is put on his head. His mother, father's sisters, and the other women present circle money round his head and give it to the beggars. Then the groom is taken out on Banvara to the village square twice, and the accompanying ceremonies, described earlier, are performed.

The last rite of the day is a journey around the village by the groom to bid *salam* to the relatives, each of whom gives him one rupee. Then the groom and certain male relatives leave for the bride's village in bullock carts. The reason for leaving at this time, ahead of the rest of the *barat* (groom's marriage party), is that often more than one *barat* arrives at the bride's village on the same day because people marry more than one daughter at a time and because it is considered prestigious to be the first to arrive at the bride's village.

The Wedding Day

On this day the groom's marriage party leaves home in the morning and reaches the bride's village in the afternoon. The party joins the groom and his companions

camping outside of the village. Before entering the village, they must receive a formal invitation from the bride's father. In the afternoon, the bride's family Nai comes and invites the *barat* to enter the village. Two or three bullock carts are sent by the bride's family for *agvani* (the meeting of the guests on the way). On contacting the *barat*, they turn back and race towards the village with the bullock carts of the *barat* following them as closely as possible.

Gorva

On the outskirts of the village the elders of the bride's family greet the *barat*. A ceremony called Gorva is performed, in which the girl's father, her uncles, and other relatives meet their counterparts on the boy's side. The relatives are introduced to each other, shake hands, embrace, and exchange greetings. A representative of the bride's family gives some money, usually five or eleven rupees, to the oldest relative of the groom in the *barat*. After Gorva, the members of the *barat* enter the village and walk to the place where they are to stay. Women of the village stand in small groups on the wayside, some singing songs, some giggling, and some commenting on how ugly, ill-mannered, and badly clad the members of the *barat* are. The men in the *barat* may occasionally retort good-humouredly, but they are not to get angry. In some parts of India, such remarks are regarded as the prerogative of the bride's family only and are a reflection of the strong feelings about family honour and prestige in a situation where the families involved are of unequal status. The bride's family is conscious of its inferior position and the condescending attitude of the groom's family, and it symbolically retaliates by abuse and challenge in the songs. But, among the Meos the status of the bride's family has improved, and hence the customary uncomplimentary banter has become mutual.

Nikah

The wedding among the Meos is performed in a mosque by a Muslim religious practitioner according to the

Islamic Nikah ritual. In fact, this is the only real Islamic ritual in a Meo marriage, for up to this point the Hindu custom is followed. The groom is seated facing Mecca, and the mullah facing the groom. The *barat* and some of the bride's relatives sit behind the groom. The mullah reads lines from the *Koran* and administers an oath to the groom whereby he accepts the bride as his wife and promises to act in accordance with the Islamic rules of conduct between husband and wife. The Nikah is very brief and is accorded very little importance by the Meos in comparison with other rituals performed at marriage. Even the details of the Muslim rules governing the conduct of married couples are not spelled out. This is in keeping with the male-oriented outlook of Meo society in which men are required to promise very little to women.

At the conclusion of the Nikah ritual, the groom stands up and bids *salam* to everyone present. The bride's father gives the groom and the mullah some money. A member of the *barat* distributes dried dates and puffed grain to the assembled men, who may then disperse. The mullah goes to the bride's house, where he repeats the Nikah and administers the oath to her.

Tokri-ka-Neg

In the late afternoon, the Nai of the bride's family comes to the quarters where the *barat* is housed for a ritual called Tokri-ka-Neg (literally, ritual of the basket). The groom's father and uncles hand him a basket containing shoes, clothes, toilet articles for the bride, and some dry dates and parched sugar-coated gram tied in red cloth. A fixed amount of money is given to every *kamin* of the bride's family by the groom's father. The popular practice is for the *kamins* to come to the place where the ritual is held. The Nai calls them one by one and tells the groom's father the amount to be paid to each. But sometimes, to save time, the Nai computes the total and receives that amount from the groom's father and later distributes it among the *kamins*.

The Nai delivers the gifts to the bride's family and

returns the empty basket to the groom's father, who pays him for his services.

Barothi

In the late evening the Nai comes to invite the *barat* for dinner. The groom leads the procession through the village streets. When the *barat* reaches the bride's house, a ritual known as Barothi is performed. The bride's father's sister with a pitcher on her head, and her husband, with a brass tray containing two small earthen lamps, a small pot full of water, and some rice and sugar, meet the groom and the *barat*. The groom is given a wooden plank to stand on, and the bride's father's sister's husband offers *arti*. The groom's father or uncle puts some money in both the pitcher and the brass tray, and the bride's father presents the groom with eleven rupees.

The *barat* is then seated for dinner in an open courtyard. The groom, with two or more companions, sits in the middle on a cotton sheet and he is served first. The Nai of the bride's family washes the groom's hands before and after the meal, and he is given money as a reward. This first meal consists of rice, sugar, and clarified butter. Each person is given an extra plateful of rice as *kotal* (special plate for exchange), which he can give to some Meo family in the bride's village in exchange for two breakfasts during the *barat's* stay in the village.

In the morning of the second day, the bride's family sends breakfast for the groom. Other members of the *barat* disperse to the various houses in the village where they had earlier given the *kotal*. The midday meal, which consists of *roti* and meat curry, is served at the bride's house.

Badhar

At about four in the afternoon, a Nai and three or four relatives of the bride, usually her father's brothers, come to the *barat's* lodging for a ceremony called Badhar. The various *kamins* of the bride's family gather together to receive gifts of money from the groom's father. The

Nai, in consultation with the bride's uncles, tells the groom's father how much to give to each *kamin*. The amount is usually fixed.

During the afternoon, the members of the *barat* visit their relatives in the neighbouring villages. For recreation, they are provided with some entertainment. They may reward the entertainers if the performance is impressive.

On the third day, before the *barat* is invited for the midday meal, the bride's mother, together with certain other women of the family, worships at the village well. Later, when the *barat* sits down to eat, she puts a *lhasi*, an *endhi*, and a brass pot on the groom's father's head. The assembled women sing songs in chorus. The groom's father gives one or two rupees to the bride's mother, who, in turn, gives him twice that amount.

Soon after the *barat* returns to its resting place from the midday meal, the Nai of the bride's family arrives to collect rewards for three female *kamins:* the goldsmith's wife, the bangle seller, and the wife of the Nai. The groom's father gives some money for each of them.

Lik-ka-Neg

In the afternoon, all the members of the *barat* are invited to the bride's house for a ceremony called Lik-ka-Neg. The bride's family displays the dowry for the benefit of the *barat* and then hands it over to the groom's father. Then the groom's family displays the gifts it has brought for the bride's family, for the village mosque, for the village religious school, and for the village panchayat *ghar*. Gifts of money are distributed to the *kamins*. The bride's father gives one rupee each to the members of the *barat*.

Bida

"Bida" literally means "farewell" to the members of the *barat* when they pack their belongings and get ready to leave. The groom goes to the bride's house to bid *salam* to the women in the family. Each woman present feeds him some rice and gives him a present of money.

Sometimes the mother-in-law gives a cow as a gift on this occasion. The groom then returns to his bullock cart.

The bride bids farewell to her mother and other relatives, crying loudly as she does so. She is comforted by the women and led to the groom's bullock cart. It was customary for the Nain (Nai's wife) to accompany the bride on her first visit to her husband's village, but this practice has since been discontinued.

The bride's *sahvasani* stands in front of the bullock cart of the bride and makes a mock attempt to prevent it from leaving. The groom's father gives her eleven rupees, and she allows the cart to move. This ceremoney is called Bahaura. Sometimes some of the *kamins* may also stand in the way of the bullock cart and may have to be given money to give way.

After the *barat* has left the village, the Mirasi drums on the *nagara* and produces the sound called *danka* by using a firm, slow beat which lends an air of sadness. He also sings *jas-ke-dohe* (songs in praise of the *jajman*). He and other *kamins* are given money by the bride's father.

On the way home, the groom's younger brothers and cousins ask the bride for some sweets. Because this is a common custom, the bride's mother prepares her daughter for this by putting a packet of sweets in the bullock cart.

The members of the *barat* walk back home in groups; the one who reaches the village first and brings the news of the wedding to the groom's mother gets a lump of sugar from her. The groom's mother and other women come to the edge of the village to receive the newly-wed couple. They help the bride get down from the bullock cart. An end of the bride's kerchief is tied to the end of the groom's shawl. The groom's *sahvasani* puts an *endhi* and a pot containing a branch of the *pipal* tree on the bride's head. Women sing Todarmal songs in praise of a Meo hero of that name as they pass through the village to the groom's home.

Before the couple enters the house, the *sahvasani* places a low wooden stool on the threshold. The groom puts his left foot on the stool, and the bride puts hers on top of his. The groom gives some money to the *sahvasani*, who

then performs *arti* with a brass tray containing two lamps, rice, sugar, and a small pot full of water. After this, she holds a broom in one hand and a pounding stick in the other, symbolic of some of the duties of the bride in her new role as a housewife. The groom gives the *sahvasani* some money for performing this ritual.

The couple enters the house and sits down on a mattress spread on the floor. A younger brother of the groom sits in his lap and asks for some sugar, saying "*Bhai, bhai, gur mero aur chhoro tero*" ("Brother, brother, I get sugar and you get a son"). He then sits in the bride's lap and says the same thing to her, substituting "elder brother's wife" for "brother". The groom's mother puts seven layers of boiled rice, with sugar and clarified butter in between each layer, in a large pot. The bride eats from this pot together with six other *suhagin* (married women whose husbands are alive). each of whom gives her one rupee after the meal.

After this ritual, the groom leaves the room, and another ceremony called *Munh Dekhna* (seeing the face) begins. The groom's mother lifts the veil from the bride's face and looks at it, presumably for the first time, and gives her an ornament or money. Other women then see the face of the bride and give her money or grain. For several hours village women keep coming to see the bride.

After the bride has spent two or three days at her husband's home, her father arrives with three or four relatives. They stay with the groom's family for three days as honoured guests. Then they return to their village with the bride.

Gauna

Since most boys and girls marry at a very young age, they do not start living together immediately after the marriage. The bride returns to her parents' home after a brief visit to her husband's village. She stays with her parents until another ceremony, called Gauna, is performed. Gauna may take place one or more years after marriage, depending upon the age of the couple. A very young bride's Gauna may occur as long as ten years after

marriage. However, if the couple is physically mature, the bride's father may give an extra gift to the groom at the time of Bida and thereby eliminate the need for Gauna. In such a case, the bride can live with her husband without any further rituals.

In most cases, the bride begins to live with her husband after Gauna and visits her parents infrequently and for relatively short periods. However, there are cases when the Gauna of a young bride is performed about a year after her marriage, but because of her physical immaturity, she returns to her parents and stays with them until she is fit to lead married life. Such an arrangement usually results from fear on the part of the groom's family that the bride's family may cancel the marriage.

Usually the groom and three or four of his uncles or brothers go to the bride's village for Gauna. The groom's parents are not to accompany them. A date for Gauna is fixed with the bride's father through a Nai. The bride's father receives the guests on the appointed day and treats them with great honour for three days. After dinner on the first day, the oldest of the guests puts a one-rupee coin on the tray for the Nai or a *sahvasani*. No ceremonies take place on the second day, and the men spend time talking and smoking the *hukka*. In the afternoon of the third day, the Nai collects gift money from the groom's party, usually five to eleven rupees for the goldsmith's wife and the female bangle seller. The bride's father gives each of the guests one rupee and a turban, but to the oldest man he may give some clothes in addition.

Gifts of clothes are given to the groom's mother, his father's sisters, and sometimes to other relatives as well. Some grain is given, the amount of which may vary from two to twelve quintals. It is customary among the Meos to give cows as gifts on the occasion of Gauna. All these gifts are called *tird*. Before leaving for his village the groom goes to the women's quarters to bid farewell to his mother-in-law and other relatives, from each of whom he receives one rupee. In the late afternoon of the third day, the groom and his companions return to their village with the bride.

arrival of the barat *in the bride's village*

death rites

On reaching the groom's village, the bride is helped down from the bullock cart by women. She brings lentils and flour with her. Her mother-in-law distributes these and a mixture of cooked rice and sugar among her relatives.

DEATH

The death rites begin immediately after the death of the person. The grave is prepared in the family graveyard which is usually a corner of a field near the village. The dimensions of the grave depend upon the size of the corpse. For an adult, a pit two metres long and one and three-fourths metres deep is dug. The width of the grave, however, narrows from one and half metre to three-fourths of a metre at a depth of one metre from the ground level. This creates a narrow space in the centre, in which the corpse is laid, with a ledge on each side half a metre above the bottom, on which a stone slab is placed to seal the grave.

A practising Faqir is called to direct the preparation of the *mayyat* (corpse) for its last journey. From a sixteen-metre long white cloth are made three sheets, one cap, two *tehmats*, one *alfi*, one *jan navaz* (a sheet spread on the ground for prayers), one towel, one bag, and three thin straps for binding the corpse.

The corpse is placed on a slanting wooden plank to purify it according to the Muslim custom. The old clothes are removed, and a new *tehmat* is put on the corpse. First the rectum is wiped with five little clods of mud, and then the penis with two. The Muslim *vazu* (ablutions) are carried out by washing the various parts of the body with warm water containing leaves from a fruit tree known as *ber (Zizyphus glabarta)*. This takes the following order: hands, the mouth, the nostrils, the face, the right and left arms up to the elbow, and the right and left feet. Finally, the whole body is bathed. A close relative of the dead person pours water while another rubs the body with his right hand covered with a new cloth bag. The corpse is then wiped dry with the towel and transferred to a cot on which two sheets and the *alfi* are spread. The *alfi* is laid out in such a way that, when folded over, the head

of the corpse projects through the slot. The body is then dressed in a *tehmat* and the cap. The two sheets are folded over, first on the left and then on the right. The corpse is bound with the three straps: one over the head, one around the waist, and the other near the feet. Perfume is sprinkled over the corpse. The third sheet is put over the body, covering it and the cot, and again scent is sprinkled.

While repeating the *kalma,* four male cousins of the dead person lift the cot on to their shoulders and carry it to the graveyard. On the way, other relatives relieve the pallbearers, and the *kalma* is repeated every time the change takes place. All the pallbearers have their heads covered. About half-way, the cot is placed on the ground. This is symbolic of the rest the dead person needs on his long journey to the next world. On reaching the grave, the cot is laid beside it, and a sheet is spread on the ground for the mullah to stand on and lead the assembled people in prayer for the deceased. They take off their shoes and pray, contrary to the usual Muslim practice of kneeling and bowing, standing on the shoes.

The corpse is then placed in the grave with its face towards Mecca. An earthenware pitcher with water is put beside the corpse. Perfume is once again sprinkled over the corpse. The sheet which was used as a covering and the one used by the mullah at prayer are given to the Faqir. Two stone slabs are put over the narrow part of the grave, covering the corpse, and the cracks are filled with wet mud. A brother of the dead person pours three fistfuls of loose earth over the stone slabs, and all his cousins and other people present do likewise. Then the grave is filled with earth, which is heaped in a mound about twenty centimetres above the ground. The spade used for filling the grave with earth is referred to as *phainta mor.* It is passed lengthwise over the grave three times while someone pours water over it. The implements used for the burial are taken back to the place where the corpse was washed. Sometimes sweets and burning incense sticks are placed on the grave. For the first night the grave is left in the care of Mother Earth, and from the second till the seventh night a Faqir has to sleep near it

and guard it against wild animals.

After the burial the men that followed the corpse return home. No one is to weep, otherwise it makes the journey of the soul of the deceased more difficult. However, women do wail, but are advised to be quiet. They are given *nim* leaves to chew so that the bitter taste may distract their attention.

On the third day following the death, a ceremony called Tija is performed. Relatives of the deceased visit the grave early in the morning and make an offering of a flower or *dub* grass. Some of them pray near the grave for the benefit of the dead. Sweets are distributed to those who call at the grave and also to those assembled at the house.

The women in the bereaved family clean and plaster the house, wash the clothes and the mattress of the deceased, and bathe at the village well. The clothes are given to the Faqir, together with ten to twenty kilograms of grain as payment for his services. In the evening, rice pudding and meat are cooked, and the Faqir, the pall-bearers, and some of the village elders are fed.

The family may arrange for the reading of the *Koran* for about forty days. The mullah reads the holy book every day either in the mosque, or at the deceased's home, or near the grave. He tries to complete the reading on a Friday—an auspicious day for the Muslims. On the last day, he requests the supernaturals for transferring the benefit of the reading to the deceased. Then sweet rice is cooked, and the villagers are fed. The mullah is given gifts of food and clothes.

These death ceremonies are for adult males. In the case of women some of the rituals are eliminated. For small children none of these rituals are performed. They are quietly buried in the family graveyard without formally notifying the death even to the close relatives.

FATIHA

The first of the 114 *suras* (units of the *Koran)* is a short prayer, entitled Fatiha. The prayer is offered to God "for the remission of the sins and the acceptance into Heaven

of the individual in whose name it is desired. . . ."[1] In Mewat, the term Fatiha refers to a complex set of ceremonies and festivities organised in honour of a deceased person, particularly if he was the head of the family. On this occasion, the oldest living male member of the family of the deceased is formally recognized as the head of the family. Since Fatiha has become an occasion for conspicuous spending, the affluent Meos arrange lavish feasts for even distant relatives. I heard that once a rich Meo held a Fatiha for his favourite bullock.

The Fatiha is usually arranged at the most convenient time for the family within a year of the death. The Nais and the Mirasis are dispatched weeks in advance to inform the relatives. Hundreds of people, including the sons' wives' relatives and the married daughters' relatives of all members of the joint family in which the death has occurred are invited. Often, all the villagers are invited, and people go to listen to the professional entertainers on these occasions. Since it is one of the rare events in which women participate, they enjoy it more than men. This provides women with the opportunity to put on their best clothes and jewellery and to go outside of the village. They enjoy singing songs and meeting relatives, particularly those with whom they can joke and engage in horseplay.

The Fatiha activities continue for three days. On the first day, relatives arrive in groups. Before entering the village, women form into circles with their arms on one another's shoulders and sing popular songs. When they meet the relatives in the village, again there is the singing, and this goes on until the early hours of the following day. The host family arranges for a gramophone and loud speakers in a central location and records of popular film songs are played for the benefit of the guests. A feast of rice and sugar is held in the evening.

The next morning, professional entertainers such as the

1. Jaffur Shurreef, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India*, London, Parbury, Allen and Co., 1832, p. lxxii.

Mirasis and the Bhands set up little stations and amuse the crowd with songs, jokes, and mimicry. The audience give them money if they enjoy the performance. The mid-day meal, which consists of meat curry and *roti*, is shared by a large number of people. In the afternoon, the Pagri (turban) ceremony which is a popular Hindu custom is held. The successor to the deceased sits on a low wooden stool, and one of his close relatives winds a bulky white turban on his head and gives him some money in recognition of his status as the new head of the household. Other relatives also come forward and offer him miniature turbans and money, the amount varying from one to fifty-one rupees. A Mirasi announces each offering, the name of the person, his relationship to the new head, and the amount. A clerk, who sits nearby with a notebook, records all the information which helps reciprocation on similar occasions. Non-relatives, especially people of one's own village, also present gifts. At one of the Fatihas I observed, even the Punjabi refugees offered turbans and money.

After Pagri, the various *kamins* are given money by a member of the family on behalf of the new head. The amount each *kamin* is to be given is determined on the basis of precedent. But, occasionally, a *kamin* may refuse to accept the fixed amount and may have to be given more.

The guests are fed sweet rice in the evening, and the entertainment continues until late in the night, when a ceremony called Samdole begins. Women are the performers in this, and men mere spectators. Singing and dancing competitions are held between groups of women from different villages. Two groups, usually affinal relatives, at a time come into the open area in the middle of the crowd. Each group dances and sings by turns. The songs and gestures often have a sexual connotation. The dancing becomes brisker and the songs more risque, until each group resorts to horseplay with sexual implications. Women of one group pull members of the other and pinch their bodies and even beat them. When two groups feel exhausted, others replace them in the arena, and the contests go on all night.

On the third day, the guests disperse. The host gives

one rupee each to his sons-in-law and to all the males from the latter's villages.

The life cycle rites of the Meos contrast with their religious festivals in that whereas a good many Hindu practices are followed in observing the former, the latter are purely Islamic. This is probably because many of the life cycle elements are tied up with the family system, with the rights and obligations of various relatives, and with the belief system. Since the family remains an important factor in the society and the impulse to emphasize the interrelationships persists, there is a strong motivation for continuing these particular rituals. In the various life cycle rites, a wide range of relatives, including even remote affinals, participate. This strengthens family unity. For example, the rituals connected with marriage and circumcision involve the participation of married daughters of the family, for whom maintenance of a close relationship with their parents and brothers is of crucial importance. It is noteworthy that even when families ignore some ceremonies such as Chhatiko, married daughters perform their traditional role of bringing gifts.

Furthermore, some of these ceremonies are concerned with the health and prosperity of the maturing individual. Consequently, it would provoke anxiety to slough off practices believed to have protective value. This feeling is reflected in the following incident. In Chavandi Kalan, three Meo families performed son's marriages in 1964. One of these families performed the rituals far more faithfully than the others because this was their only son and the mother did not want to take any chances with his welfare.

There are two notable exceptions to this persistence of Hindu life cycle practices by the Meos. The first is the adoption of Nikah, the Muslim wedding ceremony. This, however, seems to be merely a token shift to Islam, since the bulk of the marriage ceremonies still remain Hindu. The second is the death rite complex. In this case, the shift to Muslim customs is complete. The reasons for this are, in part, that it involves neither family unity nor anxiety regarding the welfare of the individual. Also, the

fact that the Meos have adopted the practice of burial indicates their acceptance of Muslim beliefs in regard to death and the afterlife. Since the shift from cremation to burial is great, the entire complement of ceremonies connected with death has had to undergo a major revision.

Chapter 11

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

THE TRADITIONAL MEO PANCHAYAT

BY virtue of their numerical predominance and control over the economic resources, particularly land, the Meos wielded a great deal of political power in Mewat. It is believed that the Meo panchayat at the Pal, *thama*, and at the village levels formerly enjoyed jurisdiction over all the castes in the area. The Meo panchayat was convoked in inter- or intra-caste disputes. Its decisions and sanctions were potent and effective.

At the Pal level, there was the *chaudhri* who was recognized as leader by everyone in his territory. His position was hereditary, and he was invariably a well-to-do man, middle-aged or older. He was invited to all marriages and festivals in the Pal and was given a seat of honour and a token gift of one rupee. Ranking below the *chaudhri* were *dhings*. These were wealthy men who controlled large factions. Their position was not as formalized as that of the *chaudhri*, but their power was formidable, at least within their own spheres of influence. The *dhings* and the *chaudhri*, together with the leaders of the various *thamas* within the Pal, constituted the Pal panchayat, which could be convened by any member of the Pal in case of an inter-Pal dispute or if there was a need for a court of appeal.

Below the Pal panchayat were the *thama* panchayats. Their structure was similar to that of the Pal panchayat in that each consisted of a *thama chaudhri* and the *dhings* of the area. Some of these leaders were also active at the Pal level. These panchayats could be convened by any member of the *thama*. Because of their small territory, the *thama* panchayats were more frequently convoked than the Pal panchayat. As a matter of fact, the *thama* panchayats are even now occasionally convened, although they have lost their traditional powers and sanctions and the institution of the *chaudhri* no longer exists.

In 1964, the *thama* panchayats were held twice in the area that included Chavandi Kalan. On one occasion a man had lost eight buffaloes which were traced to a Meo of another Pal. The accused was a renowned thief and had refused to return the animals to the owner. The owner called a *thama* panchayat, not so much to organize a raid as to gain the sympathy and support of the *thama* members. He had intended to report the theft to the police, but he wanted to get the approval of the *thama* so that it might strengthen his case. The attendance at the panchayat was very poor, in spite of the owner's son personally inviting the people in various villages. The few that attended could do very little except express their sympathy. The panchayat was a failure from the point of view of both the attendance and the degree of concern felt by those present. Everyone lamented the ineffectiveness of this once-important institution.

The second *thama* panchayat was held at the request of a young woman. Her husband had lost all his land as a consequence of his involvement in a criminal case and she claimed a right over her deceased father's land so that they had something to maintain themselves. Since she had no brothers, her father's brother had taken possession of her father's land. With the help of some of her uncle's rivals she succeeded in getting together a sizable *thama* panchayat, but she failed to achieve her purpose because the panchayat members were unwilling to antagonize her influential uncle by favouring her. After all, she now belonged to her husband's village, and nothing could be gained by winning her favour. However, there was another reason for the panchayat's unsympathetic attitude towards her. The Meos do not believe that a married daughter has any right to her father's property. Again, the ineffectiveness of the traditional panchayat was demonstrated. After the *thama* panchayat failed to help her, she filed a suit in a court of law.

The third level of traditional Meo panchayat existed at the village level and consisted of the heads of important families. In villages where non-Meo castes were represented in large numbers, some of their members could

also be included in the village panchayat. This privilege, however, was not extended to the *kamin* castes, especially to "untouchables" such as the Chamars. To be eligible for panchayat membership, a non-Meo had to be wealthy and exceptionally capable. Most of my informants in Chavandi Kalan agreed that the traditional village panchayat functioned fairly effectively until 1959 when the statutory panchayat was introduced by the State government.

THE STATUTORY VILLAGE PANCHAYAT

The Rajasthan Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act, which provided for an extension of Panchayati Raj[1] institutions throughout the State, was passed on 9 September 1959. The principal aim of Panchayati Raj was to introduce self-government at the local level. Popularly elected panchayats at the village, *tehsil*, and district levels were given the responsibility of local development activities. It was hoped that the villagers would become enthusiastic about the development of their own localities and would slowly gain the capacity for self-reliance, which had been so pitifully lacking. It was also felt that the adult franchise,[2] on which the panchayat was based, would remedy a defect in the Community Development Programme which tended to favour the wealthier members of the village society.

The statutory village panchayat consists of eight *panchs* (panchayat members) and one *sarpanch* (panchayat chairman). Sometimes the number of *panchs* has to be increased by three or four additional members. The law provides that the panchayat must include at least one representative of the scheduled castes, two female members, and one representative of the scheduled tribes if they constitute over five per cent of the population in the area. If these requirements are not met in the normal process, additional members are to be coopted by the elected mem-

1. Panchayati Raj (literally, government by panchayat) is the term used for the system of local self-government introduced in rural India after Independence.

2. Under the adult franchise in India, every man and woman twenty-one years of age and above has the right to vote.

bers. Each of the *panchs* represents a ward, and the *sarpanch* is elected for the whole area. Every voter has two votes: one for his ward *panch* and the other for the *sar panch*.

At the time of the first elections to the panchayat in January 1961, the Meos of Chavandi Kalan were reluctant to participate in them. The traditional leaders did not seek office in the village panchayat.[3] Out of a total of eleven members of the newly constituted body, which represented four villages—Chavandi Kalan, Berla, Bai, and Barhera—only two were Meos. The Punjabi refugees held three seats, the Faqirs one, the Khatis one, and the Brahmans one. The *sarpanch* also was a Punjabi. In 1961, a scheduled caste representative and two women members had to be coopted by the eight elected members and the *sarpanch* of the panchayat. A Chamar man was chosen to represent the scheduled castes. The two females coopted were also Chamars, since no other caste was willing to have its women hold public office. Thus, the Punjabi refugees and the Chamars dominated the panchayat.

The relative indifference towards the panchayat elections on the part of the Meos was due to several factors. In the first place, they were distrustful of the government and avoided close contact with its institutions. Second, they did not think that the members of the new panchayat could threaten their leadership. Third, some of them felt that competition with the non-Meos for village leadership was a disgrace. Lastly, the idea of asking their *kamins* for votes was repugnant to their pride.

THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS OF 1965

Because of administrative delays, the second panchayat elections were held in Chavandi Kalan on 7 January 1965, instead of in 1964. Most villagers had misgivings about the usefulness of the elections. The Meos were more opposed to the idea than others. One Meo said: "Elections are free entertainment for us. People are fighting like

3. A village panchayat normally represents one or more villages with a total of at least 1,000 voters.

dogs for nothing except a little prestige." Another Meo complained: "It is all a waste of time and money. The only gain is prestige. But wise men attain prestige anyway. For them, elections are not necessary. After all, there have been leaders in our village who were respected without having won any election." An old man remembered the example of a prominent Meo leader of the village who had died recently: "Hasnu was liked by everyone in the village. It was because of his sagacity. He even owned a land-measuring chain, and he knew the village land as he knew the palm of his hand. That is the way to gain prestige." A Meo farmer wondered: "Why should not the government appoint *panchs* and *sarpanch*? What is the need for elections? Elections cause trouble and give rise to factions." Another villager said: "Elections are bad. They do not constitute freedom. The father wants to vote for one candidate, and the son prefers another. This leads to disharmony in the family."

The only caste group that was in favour of elections was the Chamars. They occupy a very low status in the Hindu caste hierarchy. They were never allowed to participate in the village politics. In recent years, they have been making attempts to improve their social position. The elections, therefore, provided just the kind of opportunity they were waiting for.

Although most villagers, especially the Meos, thought that elections were an evil, they were convinced that they could not ignore them. By now they had experienced the working of the panchayat and were familiar with the power and influence wielded by the elected leaders. Consequently, this time the villagers were keenly interested in the elections. About six months before the election day, a government official came to the village to verify and update the electoral roll. Instead of going to every house to enumerate the eligible voters, he consulted the *patvari* and the prominent villagers. In a short time the news of his arrival spread through the village, and many Meos came to him to have their relatives' names registered. Many of them lied about the age of the prospective voters. The official was reluctant to enrol the names for two

reasons: he had no way of checking their age and he wanted to save himself from the additional work. But the villagers were determined to have their relatives acquire the vote. Some Meos even considered bribing the official for the purpose.

Interest in Voting

The degree of interest of the villagers of Chavandi Kalan in voting is reflected in the number of people that registered as voters and the high percentage of those who cast their vote. Table 11 gives the number of males and females eligible to vote, the number registered to vote, and the number of those who voted, as well as the relative percentages.

TABLE 11

Voting record of Chavandi Kalan in the village panchayat elections of 1965 (bye sex)

Sex	*No. of eligible voters*	*No. of registered voters*	*Percentage of registered voters to eligible voters*	*No. of actual voters*	*Percentage of actual voters to registered voters*
Male	175	163	93.1	152	93.2
Female	137	126	91.9	112	88.8
Total	312	289	92.6	264	91.4

The percentage of eligible persons registered to vote is slightly higher for males than for females. Although the proportion of registered female voters is quite high, in practice women do not take active interest in politics. Their names are registered for voting by their male relatives. Some traditional-minded men hesitate to report the

names of some of the women in their families to the government official since there is the feeling that the younger women, especially young brides, should not appear in public for an activity such as casting the vote.

It is also apparent from Table 11 that fewer women cast their vote than men. The main reason for this difference was that at the time of the election some of the women were away from the village. However, some of those whose parents' villages were nearby were brought back for voting. Another reason was that a few of the women had recently given birth and were physically unable to go to the polling booth.

A total of 264 people cast their vote, which represents over 91 per cent of the voters registered. This is a clear indication of the keen interest of the villagers in the panchayat elections. As a matter of fact, all the registered voters who were present in the village on the election day and who were not physically incapacitated did cast their vote. The only exception was a Meo hajji, who abstained from voting for religious reasons. He felt that it was improper for him to participate in a mundane activity such as the elections. He preferred to devote his time to "remembering Allah".

Voting Behaviour of the Various Castes

Table 12 summarizes the voting record of the various caste groups in Chavandi Kalan.

The Faqirs and the Mirasis were the only people who did not register their votes. One member of the Faqir family is a religious practitioner, and he felt that it was improper on his part to participate in political activity. The Mirasis, on the other hand, because of their subservient attitude resulting from their caste occupation, had the feeling that it would be too pretentious of them to participate in the elections. The Chamars and the Bhangis, although of low status, are upward mobile and, therefore, participated in the elections more enthusiastically than other caste groups.

TABLE 12

Voting record of Chavandi Kalan in the village panchayat elections of 1965 (by caste)

Caste	*No. of registered voters*	*No. of actual voters*	*Percentage of actual voters to registered voters*	*No. of registered voters who did not vote*	*No. of unregistered eligible voters*
Meo	174	163	93.6	11	9
Faqir	0	0	0	0	5
Mirasi	0	0	0	0	3
Nai	4	4	100.0	0	0
Lohar	2	2	100.0	0	0
Khati	2	2	100.0	0	0
Chamar	19	19	100.0	0	2
Bhangi	5	4	80.0	1	1
Bania	12	10	83.0	2	0
Sikh	38	31	81.5	7	3
Dakot	16	13	81.2	3	0
Bairagi	3	2	66.6	1	0
Sakka	6	6	100.0	0	0
Brahman	5	5	100.0	0	0
Jogi	2	2	100.0	0	0
Khatri	1	1	100.0	0	0
Total	289	264	91.4	25	23

The Candidates for Office

About a month before the election, three candidates started canvassing for the position of *sarpanch*. All of them were wealthy landowners. One was a Meo, one a Punjabi refugee, and the third a Brahman. The Meo and the Brahman were residents of Chavandi Kalan. The real contest was between the Meo and the Punjabi, since the Brahman was the weakest of the three in political strength. A Meo villager told me: "The Brahman does not have a chance. He can be sure of getting only his own

vote. In fact, he is not serious. He is running with the hope that one of the other candidates will bribe him to withdraw from the contest."

For the offices of *panch*, there were ten candidates from Chavandi Kalan—three each from two wards and four from the third. Six of these were Meos, two were Sikhs, one a Brahman, and one a Bania. The Meos were the only caste that had candidates contesting against their own caste fellows. Two reasons account for this: their larger number, and the interest of many Meo families in gaining power. The castes that have very few members usually do not put up a candidate unless they can form an alliance with another caste group. In some cases, wealthy landowners try to win over small caste groups by doing economic favours for their members. The Chamars in Chavandi Kalan, although a sizable and interested group, did not have a candidate because they were under economic obligation to a Brahman who was running from their ward.

CRITERIA FOR VOTING

Individual voters were influenced in their decisions in the 1965 elections by a variety of considerations. They took cognizance of caste, economic interdependence, religion, and family relations. Political leaders from outside of the village were interested in the elections. Some of them sent agents to help certain candidates with the hope of soliciting their support, in turn, at a later date in the State and national elections.

Caste

Except for the larger groups such as the Meos and the Sikhs, each of the other castes in Chavandi Kalan voted as a bloc. The idea of caste solidarity was emphasized by the candidates as well as by the caste leaders through whom most of the canvassing was done. Individual voters were hardly ever approached. Economic interdependence between castes was an important consideration. Those service castes which still maintained the *jajmani* arrangement with the Meos felt obliged to vote for the Meo candi-

waiting to cast their vote

voting for the first time in 70 years

date. A Khati who served the Meos but wanted to vote for the Punjabi candidate for *sarpanch* resolved the problem by splitting the votes in his family. He said. "We will give one vote to the Punjabi and the other to the Meo. This is the only way to keep both happy."

The Chamars, who were outspokenly anti-Meo, were one of the relatively large groups which voted as a bloc. At first the Meos did not try to influence them, since they knew that nothing could be gained through persuasion. But a day before the elections some young Meos decided to approach the Chamars. They went to the Chamar hamlet and tried to canvass for support. Some Chamar women bluntly told them that the latter were only wasting their time. This infuriated the Meos so much that one of them was about to beat up a Chamar man. Some of them threatened that they would not allow the Chamars to use their wells any more. Although an open conflict was averted, the news quickly spread through the village, and the Hindus and Sikhs rushed to the scene and started shouting threats at the Meos. One young man cried: "The Chamars are our brothers. We will not allow anybody to harm them. We will let the Chamars use the village well if the Meos prevent them from using their wells." Tempers cooled down after some time, but this incident gave a religious twist to the elections, since a Hindu came to the defence of another Hindu against the Muslim Meos.

Religion

In the *panch* elections, Meo candidates were competing in every ward with fellow Meos and other castes. At the ward level, votes were not cast on the basis of the religion of the candidates. Other considerations such as economic obligations and family relationships were held paramount. But religion became an important factor in the *sarpanch* election. Here the contestants were a Meo and a Punjabi. The Punjabi was resourceful and had the support of a number of influential families. The Meo candidate realized that he needed the full support of the Meos and other Muslims to win the election. So he emphasized his religious affiliation and obtained the backing of prominent

Meos in the area. Muslims in each of the wards were called to a meeting and asked to vote in favour of the Muslim candidate.

The Punjabi candidate was tactful and subtle. He had the support of most of the Hindus, and avoided openly emphasizing his religion. He tried to win over as many Meos as possible. For this he used economic pressure. Once, during a round of the village, he forced a Meo to swear that he would vote for him. Although the Meo was willing to cast his vote for the Punjabi, he was reluctant to take the oath. Finally, he agreed to swear because of a pecuniary obligation he felt towards a strong supporter of the Punjabi candidate. When I later asked the candidate about this pressure technique, he said that he used it only where he knew that the person had no other choice.

Family

Kin relationship was the most important consideration in voting. There was only one instance of disunity in a family which could not be resolved. Two Meo cousins who would not see eye to eye prolonged their differences by supporting opposing candidates. Every other kin group in the village voted as a family unit. When approached by the candidates, individuals would say that they would vote with the head of their related families. This reason was considered so convincing that no one tried to refute it.

Outside Influences

Candidates in the panchayat elections compete on individual basis. Political parties are not supposed to try to influence the elections at the panchayat level. But local and regional political leaders at the district and State levels do take a keen interest in the panchayat elections and in the subsequent activities. They send their agents to sway the voters in favour of their preferred candidate. The over-riding intention in this is to make political hay. Several young educated Meos visited Chavandi Kalan during the panchayat elections. Most of them were lawyers who hoped to run some day for a public office. By helping certain candidates in the village panchayat elections,

they made political contacts with the hope that they might prove beneficial for them in the future.

THE OUTCOME OF THE 1965 ELECTIONS

In the election for the office of *sarpanch*, the Punjabi, who was also the outgoing incumbent, won the election by a landslide. A total of 752 valid votes were cast, of which the Punjabi obtained 522 and the Meo 230. The bulk of the Meo candidate's support came from his own village. Apparently, the majority of Meos and a few Hindu *kamins* of Chavandi Kalan voted for the Meo for two reasons: that he was a Meo which was of greatest importance. and that he was from their village. The Punjabi received almost all the Hindu votes from the four villages involved and a good many of the Meo votes from Berla. Bai, and Barhera. He had won over many of the caste groups in these villages by forming strong alliances with some of them by agreeing to support their candidates for *panch* in exchange for their support to him.

Only two candidates out of four actually filed their nominations for the office of *panch* from the first ward of Chavandi Kalan—one Meo and one Brahman. In view of the Chamars' support to the Brahman, the three Meo candidates had little hope of winning. Therefore, two of the Meos withdrew in favour of the third Meo. The Brahman won by securing 58 out of the 94 valid votes polled.

Three candidates—a Meo, a Bania. and a Sikh—contested from the second ward. The Meo won by securing 36 votes out of the 73 votes polled. The Bania and the Sikh polled 11 and 26 votes respectively. It was fairly clear that the votes were cast on caste basis in this ward.

In the third ward, two Meo candidates contested. A Sikh candidate withdrew from the contest. Since both the contestants were Meos, the criterion for voting was family connections. The successful candidate had the support of the majority of Meo voters in this ward because of his kin relationship, and received 46 of the 83 votes polled. The Sikhs in the ward, who constituted a sizable group, voted for the stronger of the two candidates, hoping to derive some benefit from him.

Long before the introduction of the statutory village panchayat in Mewat, the Meos were familiar with the idea of panchayat, since it existed in their society at the Pal, *thama,* and village levels. But their suspicion of and antagonism towards the government was so deep-rooted that they at first refused to participate in the democratic bodies of the same name. In the 1961 elections, the Meos offered candidates for only a few of the offices. This explains their less than proportionate representation in the village panchayat. The non-Meo castes, however, welcomed the new political system with enthusiasm. The underprivileged caste groups, particularly the Chamars, were greatly attracted to the idea, for they saw in it an opportunity to raise their status. The Punjabi refugees predominated in the statutory panchayat. They had come from less isolated regions, were more familiar with the concept of elections, and did not share the Meos' unwillingness to cooperate with the government.

By 1965, the Meos had become more familiar with the working of the statutory panchayat and had discovered that their fears were unfounded. They realized that they could ignore the modern political process only at their own peril. Their political consciousness was awakened. Hence, their participation in the elections the second time was much more lively and they gained more representation than before, although their representation was still not commensurate with their numerical and economic strength. This can be explained in terms of their initial poor start. But, in any case, they not only competed for every office in 1965 but demonstrated some degree of sophistication in political manoeuvring. Some candidates formed coalitions to defeat their opponents, and others withdrew to strengthen their caste fellows' chances. From all this one can expect that the Meos will participate in the future elections more enthusiastically and that they will become a political force to reckon with.

Chapter 12

CONCLUSIONS

IN order to understand and interpret the cultural change in Mewat, we must briefly review the change on the national scene, for there is a close relationship between the two. The changes in life at the village level cannot be dissociated from the economic, social, and political developments in India since 1947.

CHANGE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

After a long and arduous struggle, India attained political independence from the British on 15 August 1947. On that day, two nations—India and Pakistan—came into existence. The Muslims of India felt that in a united India their interests would be subordinated to those of the Hindu majority. Also, they were afraid of losing their identity as a cultural group. Underlying their fears was the realization that the Muslims were economically weaker in comparison with the Hindus, and for that reason they would be at a disadvantage vis-a-vis the Hindus in the secular society visualized by the Indian National Congress (Congress).

Before the Second World War, most Muslims in India were pro-Congress and apparently believed that it was possible to safeguard the interests of the minorities in a secular democratic political system. The Muslim League, however, favoured partition of the country. During the war, when the Congress refused to cooperate with the war effort, the British leaned towards the League to win Muslim support. With this tacit British approval of the partition idea, the League gained in popularity among the Muslims. To dramatize their views, the League leaders launched a series of "direct action" programmes which invariably resulted in violence, and over time created great antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims, especially in north India.

At the end of the war, the British faced a problem. On the one hand there were India's highly politicized masses and an irate Indian army, and on the other a war-weary Britain with neither the will nor the resources to preserve the empire. To quit India was the only logical solution under the circumstances. The British decided to leave with unusual haste and as a consequence caused serious problems for the Indian people. Since there was no time left to work out a compromise between the Congress and the League, such as a federation, partition was favoured as an expedient. Through secret manoeuvring, Viceroy Mountbatten got the Congress leaders to agree to the partition of India and, once this was accomplished, the transfer of power was further hastened. Boundary lines were determined in a hurry, and little attention was paid to security arrangements.

Communal tensions, which occasionally gave rise to violent incidents, reached their peak after 1947. Almost all the Hindus and Sikhs in West Pakistan were driven out and were scattered over the northwestern part of India. Up to this point, communal rioting had been restricted to urban areas, but now it spread to the villages also. Muslims from the Indian half of the Punjab were also driven out. There was almost a complete eviction of Hindus from West Pakistan and of Muslims from East Punjab in India. The Province of Bengal was also affected, but the exchange of populations was not so complete there. It is believed that during this process about half a million people lost their lives, some as a result of direct violence and others from exposure and disease. In addition, about twelve million became homeless refugees in both countries.

The violence that occurred between the two religious groups about the time of partition strained the relations between Pakistan and India so completely that hostility between the two nations continues even to this day. It is likely that the two countries will remain at loggerheads for years to come even if some of the major issues between them, such as the Kashmir dispute, are amicably settled.

Some of the princely States were also affected by com-

munal disorders. The rulers of these States, in many cases, became involved in the disturbances on the side of their coreligionists, and many even utilized their armed forces against the rival groups. As we have already seen, the rulers of Alwar and Bharatpur States were likewise influenced by extremist groups, and they forced their Muslim subjects either to become Hindu or to leave the State. In the south, in the State of Hyderabad, there was a great deal of violence. The small but dominant Muslim minority there came under the influence of the Razakars (volunteers) of the extremist Muslim party, the Majlis Ittihad-ul-Muslimin. The Muslim ruler seemed to have only limited control over the extremists; the Indian army moved in, and the State acceded to India.

Following partition, prominent Muslims who had supported the demand for Pakistan were too embarrassed to stay in India. Most of them migrated to Pakistan, and those who stayed in India gave up politics. Also, many of the young educated Muslims, especially from north India, migrated to Pakistan in the hope of finding better employment opportunities because they anticipated a shortage of trained personnel there. A residue of Muslims who were both educated and interested in politics stayed in India and joined the Congress.

In recent years, Hindu-Muslim communal politics has been revived, especially in south India where the tension between the two religious groups was comparatively mild in 1947. The Muslim League has gained considerable strength in Kerala so much so that in order to defeat the strong Communist Party in the State, the Congress had to form an alliance with the League in the 1957 elections. Encouraged by the success of the Muslim League and its experience with the Congress in Kerala, the Majlis Ittihad-ul-Muslimin was revived in Hyderabad, and the party re-entered the political arena in force in 1959.

One of the first tasks the Indian leadership was faced with was the unification of the country. At the time of transfer of power there existed in India 562 princely States, comprising about 45 per cent of the area of undivided India and, in 1941, containing about 93 million

people, nearly two-fifths of the total population of British India.[1] These States enjoyed certain powers within their boundaries, but they were under the paramountcy of the British Crown. The British Indian government had the responsibility for managing their foreign affairs, defence, and communications. The British decided not to transfer to their successor governments this paramountcy over the Indian States—a situation which became a source of considerable anxiety for the Indian leaders. Many rulers, especially those of the large States, were thinking of becoming independent sovereigns. Such a prospect was alarming, since it would have meant lack of unity and harmony for the new nation. Hence, the task of merging the States into the Indian Union was handled with speed and skill under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel.[2] Most of the smaller States acceded to India before 15 August 1947, but the larger ones such as Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Junagarh took a great deal of persuasion before they acceded with regard to defence, foreign affairs, and communications. By 1951, all the princely States were finally merged with the rest of the country.

The next major problem faced by the Congress government was the organization of the States, which were hitherto called Provinces. The Congress leaders had agreed in principle to reorganize the States on a linguistic basis as early as 1916. But no one thought of it as an urgent problem before Independence. Even after Independence, this matter was not given much attention until December 1952, when one Potti Sriramulu died fasting for the creation of a Telugu-speaking State. Following Sriramulu's death, there was so much political and social unrest in the area that the Congress government had to agree to form the State of Andhra primarily on the basis of language. Then, as if the issue of linguistic States had been smoulder-

1. W. Norman Brown, *The United States and India and Pakistan*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1958, p. 58.
2. For a lucid eyewitness account of the States' merger, see V. P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1956.

ing in the minds of politicians, this type of political division became a major issue throughout the country. A States Reorganization Commission was constituted, and the country was re-divided in 1956, mainly on the basis of language. Later, in 1960, the State of Bombay had to be divided into Gujarat and Maharashtra; and in 1966, the Punjab State was re-divided into two parts: Punjab and Haryana.

The Congress was committed to secularism. Its leadership was influenced by the liberal democratic ideology on the one hand, and the basic attitude of religious tolerance, characteristic of the Hindus, on the other. Hence, the Indian Constitution provides to every citizen equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. In a country of India's religious proliferation and cultural diversity, secularism seems a reasonable unifying principle. However, secularism is by no means universally subscribed to in India. There are groups which feel that Hinduism should be the organizing basis for the state in India. Even some of the minority groups do not accept the secularist viewpoint. For example, some Muslims feel that a secular society might eventually destroy their identity.

Leaders of modern India have vigorously opposed the caste system and the grave injustice inherent in the plight of the underprivileged castes. Abolition of discriminatory practices against the weaker castes is specifically stressed in the Indian Constitution. It was recognized that both the weaker castes and the tribal people needed some special attention so that they attained an equal position with the rest of the society. Realizing the need to help these underprivileged sections of the population, the authors of the Constitution of India provided that:

> The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, and shall protect them from

social injustice and all forms of exploitation.[3]

In implementing this Constitutional directive, the Indian government has provided special privileges to the weaker groups in the form of (1) reserved jobs, (2) guaranteed political representation, (3) free education, and (4) preference in granting governmental favours such as land allotment and credit facilities.

Furthermore, there was an awareness that the vast rural population of the country was economically most backward. Since 85 per cent of India's population lives in villages, it was felt that any planned development programme had to give special attention to rural problems. Consequently, a network of Community Development Blocks was organized with the object of assisting the farmer to improve his methods of production, his health, and his general living conditions.

The status of women in India left much to be desired Under the customary Hindu law women could not inherit their parents' property. This was rectified by the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 which provides inheritance rights to women. Among the high caste Hindus it was considered prestigious to keep women in seclusion. Although lower caste women did not practise *parda*, they were nevertheless treated as inferior to men. The Indian Constitution emphasizes the equality of men and women as citizens. Women now have equal rights with men, and the large number of women in public office since Independence indicates that the new laws have been effective.

A democratic form of government was organized at the State and the Federal levels. Members of both the State and the Federal legislatures are elected by the people on the basis of adult suffrage. Further attempts at democratic decentralization were made in the institution of Panchayati Raj. Popularly elected bodies were created at the village, *tehsil*, and district levels and were given responsibility for local self-government.

3. *The Constitution of India*, Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1960, p. 27.

Planned economic development was the goal of the new government. Immediately after Independence, a Planning Commission was established and the First Five Year Plan was launched in 1951. Since then, considerable increase has been achieved in industrial output, especially in key industries such as steel, chemicals, machinery, etc. Public transportation and roads, particularly, have been improved and expanded. In the period 1951-1961, the mileage of hard-surface roads in the country was nearly doubled, and the number of vehicles on them was increased more than threefold. Realizing the need for education, educational facilities were expanded in cities and in villages all over the country.

CHANGE AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL IN MEWAT

The change at the national level has directly or indirectly affected certain changes at the village level. Some of these changes, as seen among the Meos of Mewat, have been described at length in this study, and they may be briefly summarized here.

In the economic organization of the village society, one of the most significant changes has been the withering away of the traditional *jajmani* system—the exchange of services between the caste groups. Many of the *kamin* castes have acquired land through government measures or by their own efforts. Some of the castes which do not own land are aspiring for it. The result of this is that they either completely break the *jajmani* arrangement (as the Chamars have done, for example) or devote less time and attention to it.

Some castes, especially those that still do not own land. such as the Sakkas, seek more lucrative employment in the towns and cities. Since their income from urban work is more substantial, they feel less attracted to their traditional obligations in the village.

The castes which traditionally provided religious and shamanistic services have a much reduced demand for them in the village. The reason for this is partly the Islamization of the Meos and partly the diminished interest of the villagers in these services. Consequently, the members

of these castes have a tendency to resort to new kinds of business in the village such as tailoring: both the Muslim *hafiz* and the Hindu *purohit* fashion clothes for the villagers. They are, thus, earning a supplementary income.

Some of the Hindus of Mewat migrated to urban centres during partition, and quite a few of them have not returned to the village. This has reduced the strength of the service castes and has made it necessary for the Meos to seek service in the cities. This tendency has had a weakening effect on the *jajmani* system,

In recent years, even the Banias, who provided credit to the farmer in the form of cash or grain and who maintained retail shops in the village, have lost much of their business as a consequence of the work of the Community Development Department, which now provides cheap credit and seed. As the farmer's contact with the town is increasing, he tends to buy even daily necessities from the more economical urban market; this has an adverse effect on the volume of business of the village shopkeeper.

Lastly, because of the transfer of population between India and Pakistan, many villagers lost their old homes and settled in new places. Their obligations to the traditional *jajmani* system, which in some cases were weak to begin with, were cancelled. In their new villages they preferred not to enter into any such arrangement.

As a consequence of some of these changes, in particular the weakening of the *jajmani* system, the contact of the villager with the money economy has increased. He is now using many more things of urban origin which he did not have in the past. In addition, he buys many items from the organized market in bulk. This is an indication of a basic shift in the villager's attitude. He is now thinking more in terms of money value and, therefore, wants to buy in the competitive market. This change is, however, not universal, and some people still use grain as a medium of exchange; but more and more people are now calculating the value of things in terms of money.

Some fairly basic changes are taking place in the hierarchical social structure of the village. The first blow to the caste system was the allotment of land to the weaker cas-

tes, which broke the monopolistic hold of the higher castes over this basic means of production. Apparently, the significance of land-ownership was well understood by the villagers: to obtain land, the Chamars of Chavandi Kalan risked enmity with the powerful Meos; the Brahmans gave up their priestly profession; the Nais reduced their barbering work; the Sakkas allegedly made sexual concessions; and virtually all *kamin* castes worked very hard. In the old days, the dominant Meos even used coercion to prevent lower castes from acquiring land. But now they were themselves insecure, and the power of the government was clearly supportive of the change. The Meos had no choice but to accept the inevitable.

The introduction of Panchayati Raj, with guaranteed representation for the scheduled castes, was a second powerful blow to the caste system. For the first time in the history of the village the Meos had to share political power with the lower castes. The Chamars of Chavandi Kalan took advantage of the favourable provisions of the law and increased their effective representation by electing a Brahman from their ward, and by nominating a Chamar under the guarantee clause. Because of adult suffrage, larger caste groups got a real opportunity to gain political power, and the degree of interest in the panchayat elections evinced by various castes reflected their view of this change. The Meos, being the losers, virtually ignored the panchayat in the first election and showed interest in it the second time. The Chamars remained a solid bloc in both the elections and took keen interest. All *kamin* castes tried to use their right to vote judiciously and in a calculated way.

In order to consolidate their gains in economic and political power, the various castes in Chavandi Kalan changed their behaviour patterns. The Brahmans toned down their observance of ritual purity to such an extent that one of them openly lived with a low caste woman, and another was serving the Harijans as their *purohit*. One of the Brahmans. who recently acquired considerable area of land. became the leader of a major faction in the village and got badly injured in an attack by members of the

opposite faction. The lower castes, such as the Chamars, showed a tendency towards greater Sanskritization. The Meos, who were the biggest losers, responded to the change by turning to Islam—their adopted religion. They realized that their privileged position in the caste hierarchy could no longer be preserved by their observance of Hindu rituals, since their monopoly of land-ownership was lost and their political power greatly reduced.

The programme of the Community Development Department, with its emphasis on economic betterment, represented an unprecedented effort on the part of the government. Neither the British colonial government nor the maharajas had attempted this kind of programme. The former were more interested in law and order and the protection of British commercial interests. while the latter indulged in luxurious life. Both had the protection of the British imperial might, which meant that none had to look for popular support in any meaningful sense. The villager's view of the government naturally was that of a tax-collecting agency which was a necessary evil. He knew that the government could not be expected to do anything to improve his lot except to provide law and order in the area. Occasionally when funds were spent on public projects such as dams, it was considered a whim of the ruler rather than any call of duty. On the other hand. the maharajas did such inconsiderate things as banning the killing of wild boars in order to preserve them for their game, with no concern for the damage done by these animals to the crops.

The establishment of the Community Development Department, together with the Gram Sevaks stationed in the villages, was a revolutionary change. The villager even today, after twenty years of its establishment, is not convinced that community development is a sincere and honest programme interested in the improvement of agriculture and the welfare of the farmer. He thinks the new government is rather naive and he tries to exploit the situation. In order to become eligible for loans and subsidies, he even goes to the extent of sham activities such as digging compost pits which he never uses.

In any case, the image of the government is significantly different. The villager is not certain of what to make of it, but he knows that the new government is more affable, plastic, and more benevolent.

Village assemblies, which consist of elected representatives, have been promoted. No one (except, perhaps, the underprivileged) knew what the importance of these elected bodies would be when they were first introduced in Mewat in 1960. Consequently, there was very little enthusiasm among the villagers towards the elections. The traditional leaders did not even seek election, thinking that they were secure enough and could not lose their position. But they soon realized that they were wrong. The new panchayat did enjoy considerable power, and the elected representatives overshadowed the traditional leaders. Hence, in the second elections the response was much more lively. Because there previously existed an institution very similar to the panchayat and with the same name, the villager has grasped it fairly quickly, even though the basis of the new panchayat is entirely different.

WIDENING INTEGRATION

The Mewati villager, whose horizon was earlier limited to his own region, has since Independence participated in several national and State elections held every five years. Members of Parliament and of State Assemblies have been elected from the area. The Congress has nominated a Muslim candidate for Parliament from the Mewati constituency in almost every election. Abul Kalam Azad, who was India's Minister of Education in the first national government, sought election from Mewat. Meo leaders have been representatives in the State Assemblies of the Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan and some have occupied ministerial positions. This participation in the national and State elections has created new roles for the Meos and other castes in the area, thereby giving them a broader national awareness.

The expansion of the transportation and communication media in the country since Independence has also led the

people of Mewat towards widening integration. Although railway transportation has not improved to any appreciable degree in the area, its popularity and use have increased. More Mewati people have travelled by train since Independence than before, since there is some tendency to go outside of the area for employment and also since there is the need for visiting relatives in Pakistan.

The network of roads has expanded and improved a great deal in Mewat since Independence. There is public bus service even on some of the country roads. This was made possible by the introduction of government roadways whose policy was to provide public services even where they were not initially economical. Villagers are using these with greater frequency. Also, motorized transport has opened up the area to new business and new consumer goods.

Radio receiving sets have become more common in Mewat. Formerly, because of lack of electricity, radios could not be used; but in recent years transistor radios, which can be run on dry cell batteries, are seen in the villages. Small transistor radios are now an item of conspicuous consumption. People eagerly listen to the radio for news and for entertainment.

Since the awareness of the outside world has increased and since literacy has become more widespread, newspapers have begun to reach the villages. Although no villager in Chavandi Kalan subscribed to a newspaper, the village school teacher and the Gram Sevak did, and in this way the villager had indirect access to the newspaper. Consequently, his knowledge of current events outside of the area and his desire for more news have increased. In Chavandi Kalan, people heard about events in other parts of the country quite quickly and often asked me to comment on them. It was interesting, however, that the news that reached the villager was often selective or skewed. For example, the Muslims would hear only about the Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta, and the Hindus about the riots in Dacca in East Pakistan, whereas in fact both occurrences took place at the same time.

The Indian post office has extended its operations to

rural areas. Sub-offices have been set up in some villages to serve the surrounding settlements. The postman delivers the mail to these settlements once or twice a week. For the Meos this is a boon because they like to correspond with their relatives in Pakistan. For sending messages within Mewat, the common practice still is to use a messenger, but this option is not available to communicate with relatives in Pakistan.

The number of young men who go to college has increased in recent years. There were only three Meo graduates in the whole of Mewat in 1920, but in 1964, at least seventeen Meo youths were college students. Most of these cannot adjust to village life any more. Some, who have studied law, have set up practice. Many of them have political ambitions. Others who are not so highly trained take up employment with the government, which is still the most substantial and the most preferred employer. Since government service is widespread, these men often have to work at some distance from their native Mewat. This brings them into contact with others. Also, through them their families learn about the outside world.

ISLAMIZATION OF THE MEOS

The Meos are well aware that the partition of the country was based on religion. They know that Pakistan is a Muslim state. The Meos would readily admit that the more Islamized Meos and the Khanzadas have migrated to Pakistan because of their religious feelings. They are conscious of the fact that India is a Hindu-majority country and hence to be a Muslim is not an advantageous thing. In spite of a secular Constitution and the prevalence of a fairly tolerant atmosphere in most areas of the country, they have a lurking fear that communal strife may reappear. The Meos admit that they were nominal Muslims before partition and, in fact, they are proud of their alleged Hindu Rajput heritage. Theoretically, it is conceivable that the Meos could have stressed the Hindu elements in their culture and de-emphasized the Muslim customs. But this did not happen; on the contrary, they chose to do the exact opposite.

In explaining the Meos' tendency to turn to Islam, the first thing to be considered is the events that took place at the time of partition, especially in Alwar and Bharatpur. Attempts were made by the Alwar State authorities and the local Arya Samaj to forcibly reconvert the Meos. Many Meos went through the "purification" process, though resentful and remorseful about it. They were worried about this dramatic, forced break with their adopted religion. But what really upset them were the attempts of some Hindu zealots to force the converts to eat pork, on the assumption that this would make their conversion permanent. The effect was the opposite of what was expected. The Meos, of course, were repelled by the proscribed food and felt extremely antagonistic towards their oppressors.

However, all the Meos were not reconverted; the Meos in Gurgaon remained Muslim. The converted Meos, mostly of Alwar and Lachhmangarh *tehsils*, returned to their villages, and as soon as they took back their land and drove away the stray animals of Hindus from their fields, they were accused of insincerity. Also, some of the lower castes, especially the Chamars, began to discriminate against the Meos. In order to raise their own social status, they ignored the reconversion of the latter and disregarded their traditional high status. The Meos resented the attitude of the Chamars, but there was nothing to be done about it. They realized that the caste system had broken down and they lacked the power to enforce the traditional rules.

On the other hand, Muslim society was open to the Meos notwithstanding their past and their brief apostacy in Hinduism. A Muslim religious revival movement, *tabligue*, was started by Maulvi Muhammad Ilyas about fifty years ago. *Tabligue* had a base at Nizamuddin in the Delhi area and had tried to focus on Mewat, but without much success until 1947. This movement suddenly became popular in Mewat after Independence. Its missionaries, who are lay villagers from Mewat and elsewhere, serve voluntarily for periods of forty days. They go from village to village and advise the Muslims to regularize

their prayers and to follow the prescriptions of the *Koran*. Muslims are urged to abandon their Hindu customs and in their place to adopt the Muslim practices. The Meos responded to this. Every step they took towards Islamization had the effect of further alienating them from Hindu society. For example, the Meos started eating buffalo meat and slackened the rules regarding ritual cleanliness, so meticulously observed by the Hindu villagers. The result was that the gulf between the Hindus and the Meos was further widened.

The weakening of the *jajmani* arrangements made the Meos more independent of this archaic system. Their social and economic well-being was no longer affected by their change of religion and cultural practices. Since their caste status was no longer secure, it was inconsequential whether or not they preserved any of their Hindu customs.

With the widening contacts of the Meos, it was necessary for them to identify with other groups. The Muslims seemed the only logical group with which to associate themselves. It is significant that out of seventeen Meo college students in 1964, thirteen were enrolled in Muslim institutions. One reason for this is easier admission; another is faster social acceptance. Most of the students stated that their fellow students asked them about the Hindu customs of the Meos. Their reaction was often apologetic, and they explained that they were becoming Islamized.

Another factor of importance in the drift towards Islam is the Meos' reduced numbers and the fact that they no longer constitute the majority in Mewat. Their dominant land-owning position is also considerably weakened. However, they are beginning to realize the changed circumstances and are trying to find a niche for themselves in the emerging power structure. It was quite evident in the 1965 panchayat elections in Chavandi Kalan that the Meos were asserting themselves to regain their political position. In order to win the elections, it became in some cases necessary for the Meos to call on Meo solidarity on the basis of their religion—Islam.

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

The major observations of this study may be summarized as follows.

One, the Meos were, before 1947, the dominant land-owning caste in Chavandi Kalan as well as in most villages throughout Mewat. Other Hindu and Muslim castes in the area. directly or indirectly, depended on the Meos for their livelihood. The *jajmani* system was operative in the village under which most castes served the Meos and received payment in fixed amounts of grain at each of the two main harvests. Together with economic predominance, the Meos exercised full control over the traditional village panchayat. They enforced this unequal distribution of power essentially by preventing the *kamins* and the Harijans from acquiring land. About four centuries ago, the Meos were converted to Islam, but their economic and political dominance remained unchanged, and their high caste status was not challenged by the Hindus. Even the Brahmans continued to serve the Meos despite the change of religion. The Meos, on the other hand, retained most of their Hindu life cycle and calendrical rites and adopted only a few of the Muslim customs. In this way the caste and the *jajmani* systems remained undisturbed, and the privileged position of the Meos was protected.

Two, the end of the British colonial rule in 1947 was followed by the establishment of a democratic political system in India with provisions for economic and social change. Because Indian democracy was based on universal adult franchise, its impact was immediately felt at the village level. Later, the Panchayati Raj brought democracy to the village in a more meaningful way. In Chavandi Kalan, and in most Mewati villages, this change had a dramatic effect. The underprivileged castes, particularly the Harijans, gained a role in local politics. They took maximum advantage of the law that guarantees representation to the scheduled castes and tribes and acquired a strong bargaining position in the statutory panchayat. Furthermore, the government policy of giving preference to the underprivileged in granting economic favours led to a more equitable distribution of economic

power. All the Chamars in Chavandi Kalan were allotted land by the government, breaking a long and crucial local tradition. This raised the aspirations of all the landless castes in the village, and several of their members succeeded in acquiring land.

Three, in order to stabilize their gain the Chamars of Chavandi Kalan abandoned their traditional occupation of shoe-making and turned in the direction of Sanskritization. They adopted many rituals of the higher castes and even persuaded a local Brahman to act as their *purohit*. Several other low castes reacted in the same way to the changed circumstances. The higher castes, on the other hand, showed a remarkable ability to adapt to the egalitarian trends. The Brahmans, for example, willingly surrendered their ritual purity in favour of economic and political power. They sympathized with the Harijans and supported their upward mobility in return for the latter's support. The Meos might have protested against this, but being Muslims and having lived through a traumatic experience before and after Independence, they felt too insecure to oppose a trend which had strong support of the new government. However, realizing that the caste system was no longer viable and that their own power position could not be protected by retaining a Hindu facade, they turned towards Islamization.

Four, renewed interest of the Meos in Islam was initiated by developments at the local level, such as weakening of the caste and the *jajmani* system and the need to forge a new unity in a democratic political order. However, this process received further stimulus due to the widening integration of the Indian villages which began after Independence. During the British rule a typical colonial dual society had emerged in India. The English-educated elite crust exercised political control over the overwhelming masses of the Indian population without any responsibility to the latter. Between the two there existed a wide gap which has begun to narrow after Independence. The new links are provided by a democratic political system at every level down to the village, a nationwide Community Development Programme, better mass media, im-

proved road transport service, more schools, and the expansion of money economy. The Meos, too, are affected by these developments and are drawn into the society outside of Mewat. Here they find that it is easier for them to socially interact with other Muslims, gain admission into Muslim educational institutions, and pool their electoral strength by appealing to the Islamic bond. Religious revival among the Meos seems to be dictated by social and political imperatives and is not indicative of a renewed religiosity for its own sake. From the perspective of the Meos, therefore, Islamization may be viewed as a route towards wider integration.

Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN TAKING THE CENSUS OF CHAVANDI KALAN IN JUNE 1964 (IN CODE FORM FOR COMPUTER PROCESSING)

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
1-3		HOUSEHOLD NUMBER
4		**PATTI**
	1.	Kabira
	2.	Surajmal
	3.	Kamalia
	4.	Nasiba
	5.	Lohra
	6.	Madari
	X.	Does not apply
5		**GOTRA OR PAL**
	1.	Landavat
	2.	Bilavat
	3.	Demrot
	4.	Dehngal
	5.	Nangaria
	6.	Gaur
	7.	Varval
	8.	Samne
	9.	Ghosi
	0.	Do not know
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	Tanvar
6		CASTE
	1.	Meo
	2.	Faqir
	3.	Mirasi
	4.	Nai
	5.	Lohar
	6.	Khati
	7.	Chamar
	8.	Bhangi
	9.	Bania

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
	0.	Sikh
	X.	Turn to next column
	Y.	Dakot
7		CASTE (continued)
	1.	Bairagi
	2.	Sakka
	3.	Brahman
	4.	Jogi
	5.	Khatri
	X.	Turn to column 6
8		RELATIONSHIP TO THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD
	1.	Head
	2.	Spouse
	3.	So
	4.	Da
	5.	Mo
	6.	Fa
	7.	Si
	8.	Br
	9.	SoWi
	0.	SoSo
	X.	Turn to next column
	Y.	SoDa
9		RELATIONSHIP TO THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD (continued)
	1.	BrWi
	2.	BrSo
	3.	BrDa
	4.	BrSoWi
	5.	FaBrWi
	6.	SiSo
	7.	SiDa
	8.	BrSoDa
	9.	FaSi
	0.	
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
10		RELATIONSHIP TO THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD (continued)
	1.	DaHuFa
	2.	DaHu
	3.	DaSo
	4.	DaDa
	5.	WiBr
	6.	SoSoWi
	7.	SoSoDa
	8.	SoSoSo
	9.	
	0.	
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	
11		SEX
	1.	Male
	2.	Female
12-13		AGE
	01.	One year or less
	02.	Two years
		Etc.
	00.	Over 99
	XX.	Do not know
14		MARITAL STATUS
	1.	Married
	2.	Unmarried
	3.	Widowed
	4.	Married but wife has left
	5.	Two wives
15		EDUCATION
	1.	One year in school
	2.	Two years in school
	3.	Three years in school
	4.	Primary school
	5.	Middle school
	6.	High school
	7.	Two years at college
	8.	B.A.

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
	9.	In school now
	0.	No education
	X.	**Madrassa**
	Y.	Other
16		NUMBER OF TIMES MARRIED
	1.	Once
	2.	Twice
		Etc.
	0.	Unmarried
	X.	Does not apply
17-18		AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE
	01.	One year
	02.	Two years
		Etc.
	XX.	Does not apply
19-20		AGE AT LAST MARRIAGE
	01.	One year
	02.	Two years
		Etc.
	00.	Unmarried
	XX.	Does not apply
21		TYPE OF MARRIAGE
	1.	Wi is BrWiSi
	2.	Wi is deceased elder BrWi
	3.	Wi is deceased younger BrWi
	4.	HuBr married to Si
	5.	HU is deceased Hu's elder Br
	6.	Wi is deceased WiSi
	7.	Hu is FaSiSo
	8.	Hu is deceased Hu's younger Br
	9.	Hu is deceased SiHu
	0.	Ordinary
	X.	Does not apply
22-23		NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN TO RESPONDENT (only for married women)
	01.	One
	02.	Two
		Etc.
	XX.	Does not apply

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
24		NUMBER OF LIVING CHILDREN
	1.	One
	2.	Two
		Etc.
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	More than 10
25		NUMBER OF CHILDREN AGED FIVE OR LESS
	1	One
	2.	Two
		Etc.
	X.	Does not apply
26-27		DISTANCE OF PLACE OF BIRTH OF VILLAGE BRIDES, IN **KOS** (a **kos** equals roughly two miles)
	01.	One **kos**
	02.	Two **kos**
		Etc.
	00.	Born in Chavandi Kalan
	XX.	Does not apply
	XY.	Outside Mewat
28		**GOTRA** OF PARENTS OF VILLAGE BRIDES
	1.	Nai
	2.	Dehngal
	3.	Singhal
	4.	Kamalia
	5.	Demrot
	6.	Do not know
	7.	Bilavat
	8.	Chhiraklot
	9.	Pundlot
	0.	Saugan
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	Gorval
29		**GOTRA** OF PARENTS OF VILLAGE BRIDES (continued)
	1.	Dehrval
	2.	Duhlot

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
	3.	Siroiya
	4.	Landavat
	5.	Makhria (Ahir)
	6.	Besar
	7.	Varval
	8.	Kalet
	9.	Mandari
	0.	Do not know
	X.	Does not apply
30-31		DISTANCE OF PLACE OF MARRIAGE OF VILLAGE DAUGHTERS, IN **KOS**
	01.	One **kos**
	02.	Two **kos**
		Etc.
	XX.	Does not apply
	XY.	Pakistan
	YY.	Outside Mewat
32		**GOTRA** OF HUSBANDS OF VILLAGE DAUGHTERS
	1.	Dehngal
	2.	Pahat
	3.	Nai
	4.	Chhiraklot
	5.	Gorval
	6.	Kamalia
	7.	Dehrval
	8.	Balot
	9.	Duhlot
	0.	Bilavat
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	Pundlot
33		**GOTRA** OF HUSBANDS OF VILLAGE DAUGHTERS (continued)
	1.	Demrot
	2.	Singhal
	3.	Besar
	4.	Bajja
	5.	Nivadhe
	6.	Tanvar
	7.	Mandari

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
	0.	Do not know
	X.	Does not apply
34-35		TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS (only for household heads)
	01.	One
	02.	Two
		Etc.
	XX.	Does not apply
36		NUMBER OF MARRIED DAUGHTERS OR SISTERS (only for household heads)
	1.	One
	2.	Two
		Etc.
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	More than 9
37		MAIN OCCUPATION
	1.	Agriculture
	2.	Traditional caste occupation
	3.	Both 1 and 2
	4.	Household work
	5.	Agricultural labour
	6.	Cowherd or goatherd
	7.	Shopkeeper
	8.	Mullah
	X.	Does not apply
38		SUBSIDIARY OCCUPATION
	1.	Domestic service
	2.	Mullah
	3.	Agricultural labour
	4.	Begging
	5.	Agriculture
	6.	Transport
	7.	Tailoring
	8.	Skinning animals
	9.	Traditional caste occupation
	0.	None
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	Watchman

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
39		RELATIVES OUTSIDE MEWAT
	1.	In Pakistan
	2.	In Uttar Pradesh
	3.	In Delhi
	4.	Both in other parts of India and in Pakistan
	5.	In other parts of India
	0.	No relatives outside Mewat
	X.	Does not apply
40		TRAVEL OUTSIDE MEWAT
	1.	To Pakistan
	2.	To Pakistan more than once
	3.	To other parts of India
	4.	Both to other parts of India and to Pakistan
	0.	No travel outside Mewat
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	Other
41		REASON FOR GOING OUTSIDE MEWAT
	1.	To visit relatives
	2.	To serve in the army
	3.	To go into private service
	4.	To see departure of relatives
	5.	To migrate permanently
	6.	To carry on religious work **(tabligue)**
	7.	To sell products such as **ghi**
	8.	To sight-see
	9.	To study
	0.	Have never been outside Mewat
	X.	Does not apply
	Y.	Other
42-43		NUMBER OF **BIGHAS** OF LAND OWNED (only for household heads)
	01.	One **bigha**
	02.	Two **bighas**
		Etc.
	X0.	More than 99
	XX.	Does not apply
44-45		NUMBER OF **BIGHAS** USUALLY IRRIGATED (only for household heads)
	01.	One **bigha**

Column	*Punch*	*Description*
	02.	Two **bighas**
		Etc.
	XX.	Does not apply
46		WELLS OWNED (only for household heads)
	1.	One
	2.	Two
		Etc.
	X.	Does not apply
47-48		HEAD OF CATTLE OWNED (only for household heads)
	01.	One
	02.	Two
		Etc.
	XX.	Does not apply
49-50		NUMBER OF USEFUL CATTLE (only for household heads)
	01.	One
	02.	Two
		Etc.
	XX.	Does not apply
51		OTHER ANIMALS OWNED (only for household heads)
	1.	Camels
	2.	Goats
	3.	Chickens
	4.	Horses
	5.	Sheep
	6.	Goats and chickens
	7.	Camels and goats
	0.	None
	X.	Does not apply
76-78		INDIVIDUAL'S IDENTIFICATION NUMBER

APPENDIX A (continued)

RECORDING SHEET USED IN TAKING CENSUS OF CHAVANDI KALAN IN JUNE, 1964 (IN CODE FORM FOR COMPUTER PROCESSING)

Name of Household Head: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80

_____ _____

_____ _____

GOTRAS OF THE MEOS

No.	*Name of gotra*	*Villages where represented*	*Alleged place of origin*	*Other relevant information*
	(*a*) *Gotras* whose existence was confirmed by most informats*			
1	Bāglā	Nimlā and Motivaṛā (Alwar)	Not known	Minas also have this *gotra*
2	Baliānā	Navgāon Chor and Hatangāon (Bharatpur)	Not known	
3	Bamnāvaṭ	Āsākā and Fāri (Alwar); Ākeṛā (Gurgaon)	Pābhā (Gurgaon)	Originally a Brahman *gotra*
4	Baṛgūjar	Singār (Gurgaon)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
5	Baṛnāi	Bali (Gurgaon)	Not known	
6	Bendālā	Ghāṭā (Jaipur)	Not known	Originally a Mina *gotra*
7	Besar	Sākras and Āmka (Gurgaon)	Not known	
8	Bhābaṛiā	Āmkā (Gurgaon)	Not known	
9	Bhāblā	Titarkā, Khandānia, and Chamrāvali (Alwar)	Not known	
10	Bhalāvat	Not known	Not known	
11	Bharkariā	Not known	Not known	
12	Bhāṭi	Navgāvān (Alwar)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
13	Begaut	Tivāṛā (Bharatpur)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*

*The informants were four Meos, four Hindu genealogists who serve the Meos, and one knowledgeable Hindu resident of the area.

Appendix B (*continued*)

No.	*Name of gotra*	*Villages where represented*	*Alleged place of origin*	*Other relevant information*
14	Bijmān	Ākeṛā (Gurgaon)	Not known	Originally a *thama* of Pahat
15	Bilāvat	Sākras, Kairāka, and Suṛākā (Gurgaon)	Not known	
16	Boṛiānā	Alālpur, Ghurāvali, and Bhapāvali (Gurgaon)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
17	Buṛiā	Satānā (Alwar)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
18	Chauhān	Rajpur (Alwar)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
19	Chaurāsiā	Mūndpurī (Alwar)	Not known	Originally a Mina *gotra*
20	Chhonkar	Villages in Kishangarh *tehsil* (Alwar)	Not known	
21	Gaṛnāī	Not known	Not known	
22	Gauṛ	Juntrākā (Gurgaon)	Not known	Originally a Brahman *gotra*
23	Gehlot	Pālankheṛā (Jaipur); Pinān (Alwar)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
24	Godholiā	Tilakpur, Ūdhāko, and Amruko (Bharatpur)	Not known	
25	Gomal	Khāikā. and Agon (Gurgaon); Khareṛa (Alwar)	Not known	
26	Gonchha	Gonchi (Gurgaon)	Not known	
27	Goripaṭhān	Haudrānī (Delhi)	Not known	Originally Bhatiaras
28	Gorvāl	Naginā and Mālab (Gurgaon); Palāsli and Dāika (Alwar)	Sareta (Gurgaon)	Originally a Rajput *gotra*

29	Gusingā	Nāngal and Sayyad-kī-kheri (Alwar); Jaimat (Gurgaon)	Not known	Originally a Mina *gotra*
30	Jamāliā	Dādarheṛa (Alwar)	Not known	
31	Jamniā	Not known	Not known	
32	Jaṭlāvat	Andhvari (Bharatpur)	Not known	
33	Jhalāvat	Sonpur (Alwar)	Not known	
34	Jonvāl	Prithipurā and Pinān (Alwar)	Not known	
35	Kālot	Koṭ (Jaipur)	Not known	
36	Kamāliā	Sheikhpur, Mehrānā and Nāngal (Alwar); Kaithvāṛā (Bharatpur)	Not known	
37	Kāngar	Imarti-kā-bās (Alwar); Jālikā, Koludheṛā (Gurgaon); Jālukī (Bharatpur)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
38	Kaṭāriā	Karehṛā, Maroṛā (Gurgaon)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
39	Khaildār	Lachhmangaṛh and Maujpur (Alwar)	Not known	
40	Khaṛbhāi	Not known	Not known	
41	Kharkaṭiā	Not known	Not known	
42	Khaṛnāī	Not known	Not known	
43	Khonkar	Gothṛi Guru (Alwar)	Not known	Originally a Jat *gotra*
44	Kirkaṭiā	Bhatt-kā-bās (Alwar)	Not known	
45	Lambkhurā	Pinān (Alwar)	Not known	
46	Malak	Dābla and Dāblī (Alwar)	Not known	
47	Māndal	Sayyad-kī-kheṛli (Alwar)	Not known	
48	Mangariā	Ferozepur Namak, Pāchankā, and Gohpur (Gurgaon)	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
49	Manjhlāvat	Ākeṛā and Nāi (Gurgaon)	Not known	Originally a Brahman *gotra*
50	Mārag	Tuleṛā and Mālākheṛā (Alwar)	Nīmrāin (Alwar)	Originally a Rajput *gotra*
51	Markaṭiā	Not known	Not known	

Appendix B (*continued*)

No.	*Name of gotra*	*Villages where represented*	*Alleged place of origin*	*Other relevant information*
52	Mevāl	Lādpur and Ratvākā (Alwar)	Not known	
53	Morjhangāl	Dhūlpurī, Rājoli, and Dongariābās (Gurgaon)	Not known	
54	Muchchhālā	In Alwar and Bharatpur	Not known	Originally a Mina *gotra*
55	Nāharvāṛā	Ahmedpur and Akbarpur (Alwar)	Not known	
56	Nanglot	Nāngal (Alwar); Pipalkherā (Bharatpur)	Not known	
57	Panvār	Mausampur and Kirvāri (Alwar)	Not known	
58	Sanglā	Not known	Not known	
59	Saugan	Māchā and Odrā (Alwar)	Not known	
60	Sehrā	Malāvalī (Alwar)	Not known	
61	Siroiyā	Dhauj, Pipākā, and Paṭūkā (Gurgaon); Kathol (Bharatpur)	Sirohī (Gurgaon)	
62	Sugṛāvat	Akera (Gurgaon)	Not known	
63	Sukeṛiā	Mithepur, Chhāeso, and Nāī (Gurgaon)	Not known	
64	Sukoliā	Baulaj (Jaipur)	Not known	
65	Sullāniā	Rūpbās and Chimrāvalī (Alwar)	Not known	Originally a Mina *gotra*
66	Sūṛāvat	Ākeṛā and Rāmgaṛh (Alwar)	Not known	
67	Tanvar	Sobtākā and Fatehpur (Gurgaon)	Not known	

(*b*) *Gotras* whose existence was doubted by some informants

1	Bāhrevāl	Mundri, Baund, Jaund, and Karīrī (Jaipur)	Not known	
2	Balkaṭiā	Not known	Not known	
3	Bhānkṛāvat	In U.P. and Delhi	Not known	
4	Bhausāliā	Not known	Not known	
5	Chandvālā	Bhuṭiyānā (Alwar)	Not known	
6	Chhājaliā	Not known	Not known	
7	Dodhiā	In U.P.	Not known	
8	Ḍovāl	In U.P.	Not known	
9	Jāhrevāl	Kamlā (Jaipur)	Not known	
10	Kol	In Aligarh District	Not known	
11	Kūṛāvat	Marha Majra (Alwar)	Not known	Originally a Kanjar (beggar caste) *gotra*
12	Solankī	In Jaipur area	Not known	Originally a Rajput *gorta*
13	Ūdāvat	Not known	Not known	Originally a *thama* of Pahat

Appendix C

GLOSSARY

The diacritical marks used for transliteration are listed below. These have been adopted, with minor modifications, from *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1965 edition. page 26. The letter "w" has ben uesed instead of "v" in "Alwar", "Mewat", and "Mewati" in order to conform to the commonly accepted spellings of these words. The spelling of most words is local but is similar to that used in standard Hindi. Where the spelling of a local word is significantly different from its standard equivalent, the standard form is given within parentheses beneath the local word. The definition of a word conforms to local usage, even though the word may have a different meaning elsewhere in India.

TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

क	k	त	t	ज़	z
ख	kh	थ	th	ड़	ṛ
ग	g	द	d	ढ़	ṛh
घ	gh	ध	dh	फ़	f
ङ	ṅ	न	n		
				अ	a
च	ch	प	p	आ	ā
छ	chh	फ	ph	इ	i
ज	j	ब	b	ई	ī
झ	jh	भ	bh	उ	u
ञ	ñ	म	m	ऊ	ū
				ए	e
ट	ṭ	य	y	ऐ	ai
ठ	ṭh	र	r	ओ	o
ड	ḍ	ल	l	औ	au
ढ	ḍh	व	v		
ण	ṇ	श or ष	sh		
		स	s		
		ह	h		

Aghan	Hindu month corresponding to November-December
Ahīr	Hindu caste of farmers in Mewat; elsewhere usually cattle herders
alfī	rectangular piece of cloth with a slot in the middle to go over the head
amāvas	moonless night
amrelā	special songs sung by Meo women on happy occasions such as marriage and circumcision
ārtī	ceremonial moving of a flame in front of a person or ritual object
Arya Samāj	Hindu religious revival movement which urges people to adopt the rituals of the Aryans of the Vedic period (*ca.* 1000 B.C.)
Asāṛh	Hindu month corresponding to June-July
bābūjī	generic term used by the villagers to address all educated city men
Bairagī	a subcaste of the Chamars
Baisākh	Hindu month corresponding to April-May
bait	cane-shaped steel wire carried by the groom
bājrā	a kind of millet
bākhalī	boiled gram
bālī	special kind of earrings worn by Muslim women in Mewat
banglā	men's quarters in a Meo house
Baniā	Hindu caste of moneylenders and shopkeepers
bāoṛī	public water tank for bathing
barāt	marriage party that accompanies the groom to the bride's village
bastī	hamlet
baṭevṛā	storage hut for cow-dung cakes
baṭnā	paste made from turmeric and oil
Behrū	deity which protects the wells
Bhādon	Hindu month corresponding to August-September
bhadvāṛ	land reserved for the winter season crop
Bhānḍ	caste of entertainers (Hindu or Muslim)
Bhangī	Hindu caste of sweepers
bhāt	literally, cooked rice; gifts
Bhāṭiārā	Muslim caste of grain-parchers and innkeepers
bīghā	popular unit of land area measurement in north India which varies in size from one locality to another. In Chavandi Kalan it is equivalent to 0.625 acres
Brāhman	a Hindu *varna*, the highest of four such divisions in the Hindu social hierarchy
chalas	device for lifting water from a well by a leather bucket
Chamār	Hindu caste of shoemakers and leather-workers
chanā	black gram

chaudhrī	leader; an honorific term used to address influential men and certain relatives who must be treated with deference
chaukī	low wooden stool
chūlhā	small semicircular stove of clay fed from the front with one or two holes at the top for cooking pots
chūṭṭī	lock of hair left at the top of the head which is considered to be an identifying mark of Hindus
dāī	midwife
Ḍākot	low-status subgroup of the Brahmans whose caste occupation is collecting alms
darūd	a Muslim religious ritual, usually performed by Faqirs, to send food to the dead ancestors
desī	generic term used for things of indigenous origin
dhīng	traditional leader lower in rank than the *chaudhri*
dūb	a variety of grass; *Cynodon dactylon*
enḍhī	balancing ring made of grass or rags, used by Mewati women in carrying loads on their heads
Faqīr	Muslim caste of beggars
Fatiha	Muslim funeral feast
Gatrāṛā	Muslim caste of entertainers
Gaunā	ceremony, sometimes several years after marriage, when the bridegroom brings his bride from her parents' village to start living in his home
ghar	women's quarters in a Meo house; also household
Ghosī	Muslim caste of entertainers
gotra	exogamous subdivision of a caste
Grām Sevak	Village Level Worker of the Community Development Department of the Government of India
Gūjar	Hindu caste which is lower in status than the Rajputs; variant spellings are Goojur and Goojar
guṛ	brown sugar in lump form
hāfiz	person who has at least once learned the *Koran* by heart; capitalized when used as title
halvā	sweet pudding made from coarse wheat flour, sugar, and clarified butter
havan	Hindu worship involving the use of fire
hukkā	water pipe for smoking tobacco
Jāgā	Brahman subcaste of genealogists
jajmān	person belonging to a client caste who usually is a land-owner and who uses the services of the specialist castes (see *kamin*)
jajmānī	hereditary system for the exchange of economic and ritual services in return for a fixed payment in grain at harvest. This system is practised by Hindus (and in some cases by non-Hindus) of the land-owning castes and the various service castes.

jao	barley
jāt (jāt or jātī)	caste
Jāṭ	Hindu caste of farmers
javār	a kind of millet
Jeṭh	Hindu month corresponding to May-June
Jogī	caste of entertainers (Hindu or Muslim)
jummā masjid	literally, Friday mosque; mosque for special prayers
kachchā	susceptible to ritual pollution, when used of food; when used of other things, such as houses, roads, etc., it means less resistent to deterioration. Cf. *pakka*
kalmā	confession of the Muslim faith
kamīn	person belonging to a specialist caste who serves the land-owning castes (see *jajman*)
Kārtik	Hindu month corresponding to October-November
khairāt	feast given for charitable purposes
Khānzādā	subgroup of the Meos
kharīf	crop harvested in the autumn
Khātī	Hindu caste of carpenters
Kheṛapatī	literally, master of the village; practising Brahman priest of the village
khuṭail	professional buyer of stolen animals
Kshatrīya	a Hindu *varna*, which ranks second in the Hindu social hierarchy of four such divisions
Kumhār	Hindu caste of potters
Kvār	Hindu month corresponding to September-October
lhāsī	long piece of cloth to cover the head and shoulders worn by Meo women before 1947
Līlgar	Muslim caste of dyers
Lohār	caste of blacksmiths (Hindu or Muslim)
lūgṛā	piece of cloth to cover the head and shoulders worn by Meo women
madrassā	Muslim religious school
Māgh	Hindu month corresponding to January-February
Mālī	Hindu caste of gardeners
malīdā	sweet dish made from wheat flour, sugar and clarified butter
mashak	goatskin used for carrying water
maulvī	one who holds a degree from an accredited Muslim religious school
maund (man)	Indian weight approximately equal to 82 lbs.
Mewāt	popular name for the area occupied by the Meos, situated on the border of Haryana and Rajasthan
Mewātī	another name for a Meo; a variant spelling is Miwatee
Mirāsī	Muslim caste of entertainers
nagāṛā	very large drum
Nāī	caste of barbers (Hindu or Muslim)

nakkash	Muslim magical incantations
nambardār	hereditary tax collector
nepāliā	a Meo who does not belong to a Pal or Pallakra
Nikāh	Islamic wedding ritual
nīm	margosa tree (*Azadirachta Indica*)
pagṛī	literally, turban ; ceremony when the new head of the household is recognized at Fatiha
paink	a soldier of Husain
paḳkā	not susceptible to ritual pollution, when used of food ; when used of other things, such as houses, roads, etc., it means resistent to deterioration. Cf. *kachcha*
Pāl	one of twelve subdivisions of Mewat
Pallākṛā	subdivision of Mewat which is similar to a Pal in all respects but is given a different name
panch	panchayat member
panchāyat	traditionally, a body of elders of a village or caste, This institution has been formalized in most of the States of the Indian Union since Independence. Its members are now elected by popular vote.
Panchāyat Samitī	administrative institution organized at the *tehsil* level throughout the State under the Rajasthan Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act, 1959
Panchāyati Rāj	literally, government by panchayat
pardā	seclusion of women
pattī	lineage group in a village
paṭvārī	petty revenue official ; keeper of land records of the village
Phāgun	Hindu month corresponding to February-March
pīpal	variety of fig tree (*Ficus religiosa*)
pūjā	ritual worship
pūlā	a sturdy grass which grows wild in the area and is used for a variety of purposes
pūlāo	a kind of fried rice dish
pūlī	bundle of harvested stalks
Pūs	Hindu month corresponding to December-January
rabī	north Indian term for crop harvested in the spring
Rājpūt	caste of warriors (Hindu or Muslim)
roṭī	unleavened, flat, round bread common in north India, similar to the Mexican tortilla
sabāb	merit
sāḍhi	crop harvested in the spring ; same as *rabi*
sahvāsanī	literally, female companion ; a relative, usually an older sister or father's sister, who acts as a special companion of the groom or bride
Sakkā	Muslim caste of water carriers
sarpanch	chairman of the village council (panchayat)
sarson	mustard

sāvan	Hindu month corresponding to July-August
sāvanī	crop harvested in the autumn ; same as *kharif*
sehrā	a kind of crown with strands of flowers hanging in front worn by Meo males at circumcision and marriage
shuddhī	literally, purification ; act of reconversion to Hinduism
Shūdra	a Hindu *varno*, the lowest of four such divisions in the Hindu social hierarchy

Appendix D

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